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Vol. XXII No. 7 JULY 1961

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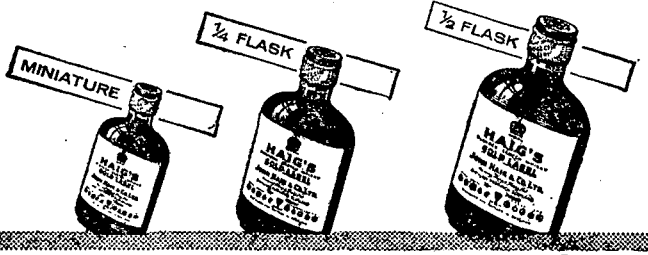

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Log Book

WE were much taken with a Pigs by Post brochure which has reached us (by post) several times recently; it is a beautifully simple system of investment whereby you purchase a pig at long range (in a poke, so to speak). Presently the pig farrows and you become the proud proxy parent of a litter of piglets which are subsequently sold to your advantage.

Pigs would be such a pleasure to advertise that we are astonished they haven't reached TV level yet . . .

	Vision	*Sound*
Frame 1	CU of live pig's face occupying whole screen.	*Grunts.*
Frame 2	Pan back to show large pig rootling in trough.	*Voices singing: This little pig went to market.*
Frame 3	Pig rolls in mud ecstatically.	*This little pig stayed at home.*
Frame 4	CU Pig appears to smile winningly at camera.	*This little pig could be YOUR pig . . .*
Frame 5	Jump cut to rapid series of pigs passing in front of camera.	*Announcer: Why not buy a pig today? Or two? Or twenty ?*

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We can also see potentialities here for a full-blooded drama—not, perhaps, *Lady Chitterling's Lover*, but something on these lines: You have bought your pig—let us call her Stephanie—and, of her guaranteed eight piglets a year (how can they *guarantee* eight? but let that pass) she has had three, Happy, Hairy, and Horrible. Naturally you are anxious to keep abreast of their progress but Stephanie can't write to you herself and you aren't satisfied with the tape recordings of grunts sent monthly from Dothepigs Farm; you decide to make a personal inspection.

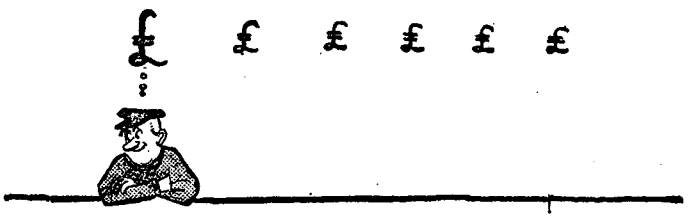
What do you find? The farm is a lone, bleak holding on the Yorkshire moors, presided over by Schweinhund, a surly foreigner; Stephanie, when you do see her, is evasive, tearful, obviously scared to talk, and as for Happy, Hairy, and Horrible, where are they? Gone; reported to have died of gastro-enteritis.

Only after midnight searches, gunfire, groping, grunts, and helter-skelter chases through the piggeries bombarded with hand-grenades by Schweinhund do you discover that this is yet another scheme of the evil Dokter Nein—this time a project for making pigs radioactive and distributing lethal pork pies round the country. Dr. Nein escapes by helicopter; H., H., and H. are saved just before they go into the reactor, and you take them back to a better and brighter life in Hyde Park.

Title: Small Boar.

Whether this masterpiece will reach your local cinema next year we can't say, but in the meantime remember that you can rely on Argosy to bring home the bacon . . .

JOHN SILVER



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FIVE GREEN MOONS

by Joan Aiken

THIS small town was of course full of people and, like all such places, so beautiful and so interesting that it would take a lifetime to describe it. But we will pick one particular morning in May when children were at school, and washing was blossoming out on lines, and delivery vans were edging their way from the narrow streets out into the countryside and, generally speaking, in all the town's not very numerous alleys and back yards and shops and houses, life, as vigorous and complex as grass roots, was being lived in the usual way.

Mr. Makins, the bus conductor, was sitting in the small communal courtyard outside his back door smoking a pipe and reading the *Daily Mirror*, since he would not be on duty till twelve. He was soaking his feet, as a precaution against the sudden warm weather, in a polythene bowl of mustard and permanganate, and his solid bulk was comfortably accommodated in an upright canvas deckchair. Sam, the large black Labrador from the Kings', next door, lay beside him, chin on paws, extending a blissful stomach along the warm concrete.

Mrs. Bowling, Rita, from next door on the other side, was doing a little weeding in the centre flowerbed; old blind Mr. Thatcher, next door but one, in panama and dark glasses, was methodically shaking out his doormat before taking his white stick and tip-tapping through the peaceful town to do some shopping for himself and his grand-daughter Lucy, a nurse at the cottage hospital.

That takes care of the externals. And as for what was going on below the surface—Mr. Makins was wondering should he or shouldn't he put on a kettle and make a cup of tea for his wife Lily who would soon be back from washing up at The Crown; Sam the Labrador was waiting in warm suspended animation for eleven-year-old Michael to come home from school; Rita

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Joan Aiken's first short story was written at the age of five. It was called "Her Husband Was a Demon, or, Twenty Tortured Years," and was a transcript of a particularly vivid dream. Since then all her better stories (she has written several hundred) have had a basis in dreams. She has had two story collections published, has two children, and works for an advertising agency. Her father is the American poet and short story writer, Conrad Aiken.

Bowling, wan, washed-out, and pretty, was making up her mind to leave her husband Fred; Mrs. King, who, since the recent death of her husband had, from unhappiness, been more or less actively unkind to her son Michael, was reading the day's horoscope in her curtained, fusty, north-facing front room before going to call on the vet; and old Mr. Thatcher was wondering whether Lucy would fancy a nice bit of haddock for supper.

Father Fogarty came up the alley to visit Fred Bowling.

"Morning, Harry. Lovely show of grape hyacinths you've got there," he said, looking admiringly round the little court which, between walls and concrete paving, was cosy with flowers as a chintz chaircover. "You can smell them halfway down the alley. Morning, Mrs. Bowling. Is Fred about?"

"Ah, what's the use of speaking to him then, Father?" Rita straightened herself dispiritedly. "You might as well save your bre—"

It was at this moment that an unusual event occurred.

With a brilliant, silent flash—so brilliant, so silent, that it was as if all the light in the world had been sucked in one direction and then blown back again—something came to rest in the middle of the courtyard, crushing to slime, regrettably, a lot of Mr. Makins' grape hyacinths and Mrs. Bowling's narcissi. Three of the four people in the court jumped back instinctively and now stood goggle-eyed, gazing at this strange object which rested in their yard as neatly as a cabbage in a colander.

It was like nothing in the world so much as a duck-egg—only, of course, a great deal larger. Higher than Father Fogarty's head, shining, spherical, and slightly translucent, there it stuck among the narcissi and it was slightly cracked.

"Gor blimey," said Mr. Makins, removing his pipe from his mouth. "Someone's laid an egg. Whatever blessed chick's going to come out of that there?"

"It's a missile!" shrilled Rita. "I bet you anything you like it's got Russians inside it!"

"This is most uncommon," remarked Father Fogarty. He

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approached the thing gingerly and laid a hand on it. It tipped slightly. "Why, it's quite light. Do you suppose—?"

"Hold on," Harry warned him. "There's someone inside it. You're right, Rita, it's a blooming spaceship."

Sure enough they could see through the semi-transparent skin of the egg that someone was bumping about inside.

"Shall I fetch a hammer?" suggested Harry.

"What's going on, what's going on?" cried old Mr. Thatcher impatiently.

Lil Makins arrived with her shopping-bag and let out a little scream. "Oh, Harry! What ever is it?"

"Wait a minute," said Father Fogarty. "He's coming out."

A tiny biting blade, a kind of circular saw, was cutting a neat division along the line of the crack. As they watched, a section of the egg-surface swung back. The knuckles of a hand appeared on the side of the hole. A foot came through, and then a leg. The other leg emerged, followed, with a wriggle, by the torso and head of a young man. He stood up and stared somewhat dazedly at the people confronting him. They stared back.

He was a very thin individual with a shock of light brown hair, an indeterminate nose, and a good-tempered mouth. His eyes, set wide apart, were grey and dispassionate. He had a pair of wings, white, and rather untidy as to the feathers.

"Do you speak English, young man?" said Father Fogarty, obviously feeling that it behoved him to make the first move.

"He must be an angel!" audibly whispered Mrs. Makins to Mrs. Bowling.

"What's going on? What's happened?" asked old Mr. Thatcher irritably.

"Is this the Isle of Albion, sir?" the young man said, addressing himself to Father Fogarty.

"Why, yes—yes, I suppose it is. May one ask where you come from?" The priest achieved a masterly blend of respect, cordiality, and judgment in suspense with these words: if you are an angel, he might have been saying, I am naturally prepared to extend professional consideration and trade rates, as it were, but although I have a kind heart I am not to be imposed on.

"Mars is my home planet," the young man said diffidently. "But—"

"Mars!" shrieked Mrs. Makins. "He's a Martian!"

"Are there any more of you on the way?" asked Harry, casting a weather eye up to see if other cream-coloured eggs were drifting down out of the blue sky.

"It's a Martian invasion! We're doomed!"

"Belt up, Lil," said Mr. Makins goodnaturedly. "They'd

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send a reconnaissance first, wouldn't they? Well then, we've just got to discourage this one."

"You are not an angel, young man?"

"You just fly back to Mars and tell them to invade somewhere else. We like our own ways."

"What is it? What *is* it?" snapped Mr. Thatcher.

"It's a Martian invasion," Rita Bowling explained patiently to the irascible old man.

Fred Bowling, roused by the tumult, put his bleary head out of a window and said, "Gawd!"

His wife called up to him, "It's a Martian invasion, Fred!"

The young man from Mars pressed his hands to his forehead. "No, no. You are making a mistake, I assure you," he said earnestly. "I am not invading you and I am not an angel."

"What are you then?"

"My name is Onil. I'm a refugee."

At this moment Police Constable Vyall appeared, taking a short cut through to the station-house. "What's all the ruckus about?" he said. "Strewth! Where did that come from? This is a right of way, I'd have you know. You can't park it here."

"I regret," said the young man faintly. "I am rather exhausted. If you will tell me—"

He looked helplessly round at the ring of simple, wondering, not unfriendly faces watching him, said again, "I'm a refugee," took a staggering step, and fell among what was left of the narcissi.

"Passed out," said Harry. "Better get him to hospital."

"My car's at the end of the alley," said Father Fogarty, "I'll take him. Have you a jacket, Harry, just to cover up the—the wings? We don't want a lot of talk."

11.09 *a.m.*, Constable Vyall wrote in his notebook. *Martian and spaceship landed in Viners' Court. Martian removed to hospital.*

It was surprising how quickly the townspeople settled to the fact that they had their very own Martian in a side ward at the cottage hospital. (His trouble turned out to be simply a slowness in adjusting to the atmosphere; so long as he had an oxygen mask handy, he was all right.) Naturally there was a stream of visitors both to the hospital and to see the ship, which had to be left in the yard since it was too large to go through the alley, but it was tacitly and universally agreed that the news should not be allowed to spread outside the town.

"We don't want half the country traipsing here to see him," said Father Fogarty.

"That we don't," agreed Harry Makins.

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As Onil had no kinsfolk of his own to visit him, the neighbours took it in turns bringing him grapes and confiding their troubles. He listened with kindly, dispassionate attention and told them things they hardly knew about themselves.

"Shall I leave Fred or not?" said Rita Bowling.

"You don't really want to. Why not teach him to play chess?"

"What does Lil want for her birthday?" said Harry Makins.

"A pudding basin. One of those red glass ones."

"What shall I get for Lucy's supper?" said old Mr. Thatcher.

"A nice bit of cod and chips from The Red Lion."

"You're putting me out of business," said Father Fogarty.

"I am so happy to be here." The young man Onil looked with love out of his bedroom window at a bit of hedge, all bursting with may-buds, and some fat, brown, contented hens.

"Tell me, why did you leave Mars to come to this rather backward little planet?"

"Mars has developed too far," Onil explained. "Nothing remains unknown there. Oh, it is terrible! All we can do is organise each other."

"I can sympathise. That wouldn't do for us down here," said Father Fogarty, and he rose to go as Nurse Thatcher came in with Onil's lunch on a tray. Young Michael King appeared with a bunch of radishes and his dog Sam. Boy and dog sat down in a puddle of sunshine on the polished floor.

"Go on telling about your trip," said Michael, and Lucy lingered, dusting the windowsill with a teacloth as she listened.

"Well, space is like a jungle, you know, and each star or planet is a potential Something that might eat you up . . . I went drifting through the forest keeping a sharp lookout for a place where people still had time to knit and gossip with their neighbours and read books and sew on buttons and listen to music . . ."

"No buttons on Mars?"

"Nothing but zips."

"Go on."

"And I saw one or two possibles—yes, there was one nice little planet that I noticed, a long way off, with five green moons and four blue oceans and three extinct volcanoes—"

"And a partridge in a pear tree?" suggested Lucy, sitting on the windowsill so that the sun made a Saturn's ring round her fair hair.

"—but it had no inhabitants, so I thought I'd be too lonely there. And then I saw this one and heard the cuckoos—they don't have any cuckoos on Mars—and I thought, That's the world for me."

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"Tell more about the little planet. What was its name?"

"Sirun. It has birds and apple trees, but no people."

"I'll go there when I'm old enough to be a space-pilot," said Michael. "Won't we, Sam?" Sam thumped his tail on the floor.

"Time I tidied you up for the doctor," said Lucy, and she took away Onil's tray and straightened up his wings.

Dr. Bentinck was kind, busy, and preoccupied as always. "I think you can soon leave off the oxygen for good. But no violent exercise at first, mind. Thinking of taking a job in the town? Well, be sure it's not too active—librarian, bank clerk, something like that, eh? Nurse Thatcher, can you see where I put my glasses? Ah, thank you, thank you. Good day, young man."

In the evening Fred Bowling came in to play chess. "That Rita," he said. "Honest to God, sometimes I think she'll drive me clean crackers. I swear I don't know, sometimes, what goes on inside that head of hers."

"Think yourself lucky," said Onil, moving out his queen.

"Eh?"

"Think how much worse it would be if you did know. Why not buy her a record-player with your pools winnings?"

"Eh—oh, yes. Forgot I'd told you about that. Yes, come to think, that's not a bad idea, she'd like a player. I've always wanted one too. Then we could listen to records instead of arguing, I suppose. Young Michael's very upset," he went on, hustling a bishop in front of his king.

"Oh yes?"

"His dog's lost. You know how much store he sets by Sam. That's why he's not come up to see you this evening—he's out on his bike, scouring the place."

"Time you were off, Mr. Bowling," said Night Sister, putting her head round the door.

"Have a heart, Sister! I'm in check! Nurse Thatcher would let me stay."

"Nurse Thatcher spoils this patient."

But even Night Sister was not averse to sitting in the side ward for half an hour and listening to descriptions of washing-machines on Mars.

Three days later Onil was allowed out for a brief spell. He strolled through the town to inspect his spaceship, and stopped for a chat with Harry Makins, who was soaking his feet in the yard.

"Getting quite used to it," said Harry, nodding at the bright translucent globe. "Puts me in mind of the Festival of Britain."

Lil brought them a cup of tea, and old Mr. Thatcher pottered by on his way to the shops.

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"Don't you have blind people on Mars?" asked Harry, noticing a troubled expression in Onil's eyes as he turned to look after the old man.

"No, we do not—but it is not that. Could I have warned him?" the young man said, half to himself.

"Warned him of what?"

"His grand-daughter Lucy is my friend, you see."

"Course she is—and a nice girl too. What's the matter, Onil?"

The young man shook his head and asked after Michael.

"Still hasn't found that dog of his. You'd better go in and see him."

When the tea and biscuits were finished, Onil knocked at the door and was let in by narrow-nosed, bead-eyed Mrs. King, who seemed genuinely pleased to see him. "If you can do anything with that boy of mine—he's so upset about his blessed dog. I've told him and *told* him it was too big for this house anyway."

Michael King was lying on the black wool hearthrug which had been Sam's bed for five years. "He won't speak, he won't eat," she whispered.

"The dog is still not found?"

"No. Michael, here's Onil and Mr. Makins to see you. Come on, get up!" The boy slowly turned round at his friend's name. Onil was shocked at his appearance. He seemed to have lost pounds in weight.

"Sam must be dead, I know he must be. He'd have found his way home by now if he wasn't."

"That's just not true, Michael," Onil said.

"It is true. Mum says so too. And if he's dead, I don't want to live."

Mrs. King pressed her lips together and said, "Don't talk in that wicked way, Michael."

Onil looked troubled. "Do you want me to help him, Mrs. King?"

"Of course!" she snapped. "If you can talk a bit of sense into him."

"Well then, Michael, your mother is lying to you when she says she does not know where the dog is. She gave him to the vet, who found a home for him on a farm nine miles from here."

"*What?*"

Michael, whitefaced, stared at his mother who cried in anger and guilt, "It's a lie, it's not true! Who told *you*, anyway? Coming in here so smarmy! Anyway how did you know? No one in the street did, I made sure of that."

"What's the name of the farm?" Michael asked, taking no notice of his mother.

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"Pingold's, North Dean."

Michael was out of the door in a flash. Onil and Mr. Makins followed him, leaving Mrs. King protesting uselessly in the empty room. "I couldn't help it. The dog cost too much to feed—"

"Was that a kind thing to do?" said Harry. "The boy will never trust his mother again. All the same," he added, "what a filthy mean trick to play on the kid. How did you find out?"

"Oh." Onil passed a hand wearily over his eyes. "I can hear people's thoughts."

"*Can* you now?" Harry Makins put his feet reflectively back into the permanganate. "So you know all that goes on inside me, eh?"

"Everything."

"Gawd. That takes some thinking about, dunnit? Do you know," pursued Harry with a fearful curiosity, "do you know when I'm going to die?"

Onil looked at him with tortured eyes. At that moment Lil, haggard and dishevelled, hurried into the court, dropped into the chair beside her husband, and burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, that poor old man! Oh, what a awful thing! It's shook me all to pieces."

"What, Lil? What has?"

"Poor old Mr. Thatcher. Run over by a motorbike as he was crossing the High Street. Oh, however are we going to tell his poor grand-daughter?"

Harry Makins turned his head slowly and stared at Onil. "You said you—you said you could have warned him. Was *that* what you meant?"

"Warned him that it would happen—yes. To prevent it—no."

"Oh, my goodness," Harry said, mostly to himself. "Oh, my goodness. You poor soul. Think of living with a thing like that."

He pulled his feet out of the basin, thrust them dripping into his slippers, and walked heavily indoors.

That evening no one came to visit Onil at the hospital.

"They're afraid," he said sadly to little Nurse Thatcher, who was back on nights—she had said she would prefer to go on working if no one objected. "They're afraid I shall tell them when they are going to die."

"*I'm* not scared," she said, and gently tucked his wing under the sheet.

"They won't come to see me any more."

But he was wrong. Father Fogarty turned up and, after some beating about the bush, came to the point.

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"My boy," he said, "if that's how life is on Mars, I can quite see why you wanted to leave. It must be terrible. I'm used to God having access to my thoughts, but the neighbours too—no. Well, you can see how it is."

"Yes," Onil said sadly. "You won't want me here. And I had hoped I was going to be so useful in the library—"

"You'll find somewhere else, my boy; somewhere just as good, with that grand little spaceship of yours. I've sealed up the crack with Polymix and if I were you I'd get going just as soon as you feel strong enough. The people in the town are very sorry—they don't bear any hard feelings—but they just don't like the thought of seeing you any more.

"Au revoir then, my dear fellow; send a picture postcard to let us know how you are getting on—"

The door shut behind him.

Wordlessly, Nurse Thatcher began moving Onil's one or two little oddments out of his locker.

"Oh well," he said. "It's a fine moonlit night for a flight. And that did look quite a nice little planet, the one with the five green moons—"

"And the partridge in the pear tree."

"If only it weren't so uninhabited."

"I'm coming too," said Nurse Thatcher.

"Lucy! You mustn't think of such a thing."

"You can't stop me! *I* don't mind," said Lucy firmly. "*I* don't mind your knowing what I'm thinking." And she gave him such a clear and beautiful look as she stood in the moonlight pressing six handkerchiefs and a cake of soap against her white starched bib that that was the end of the matter.

An hour later, as he bicycled dreamily homeward from North Dean with Sam loping beside him, Michael King saw the white ship burst upward like a giant pingpong ball from its nest in Viners' Court.

At first he grieved for the loss of his friend.

"But never mind, Sam," he said consolingly, "in eight years I'll be old enough for a space-pilot, and then we'll go up to Sirun and see the five green moons and the four blue seas and the three extinct volcanoes . . ."

And two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree.

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OPEN VERDICT

When a woman driver puts her hand out it means just one thing. The window's open.

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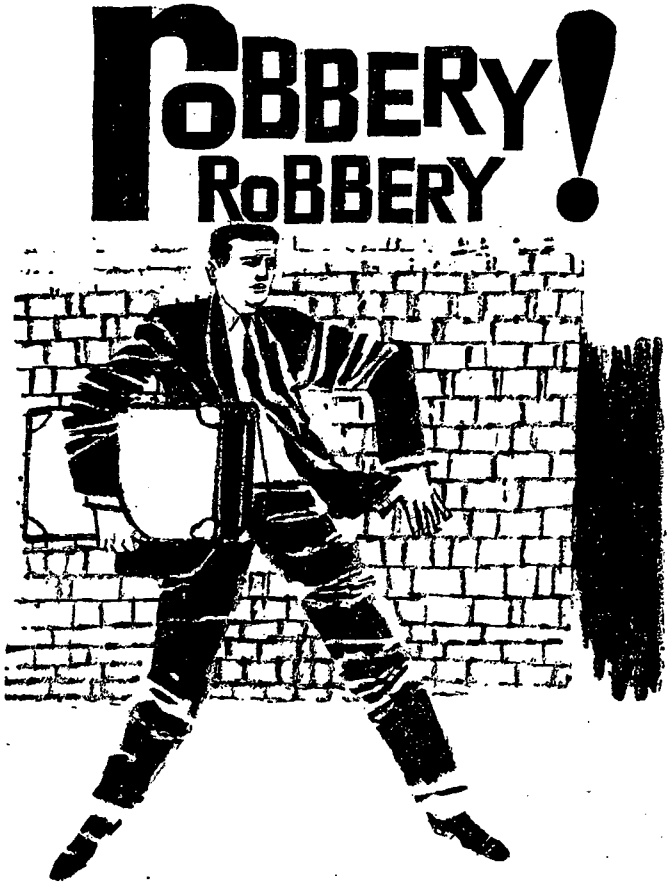

An ALFRED HITCHCOCK Choice

by William Link and Richard Levinson

CHARLES HENDERSON stood behind the bank teller's window, counting hundred-dollar bills into a neat pile. He was a serious young man in his late twenties, with a crisp crew-cut and an innocent face. It was growing hot in the small enclosure, and he felt a drop of sweat on his temple.

"Your window open?" a voice said.

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Henderson glanced up at a tall, powerful man who had come over to his counter. " Yes, sir," he said.

The man watched him for a moment. Something seemed to be troubling him. His face, to Henderson, was vaguely familiar.

" Can I help you? "

" I think so." The man slid a cotton bag under the bars of the window. He lifted the bag slightly, and Henderson suddenly noticed that there was a .38 pistol beneath it, pointing at his stomach. " Fill it up," the man said softly. " Everything you've got."

Henderson stared at the gun, his throat tightening. " Listen, you—"

" Make it quick," the man said. " No talk."

Henderson fumbled at the draw-string of the bag. He turned his head, scanning the other two tellers working a few feet away. Mr. Powers, the manager, was sitting in his office.

" Did you hear me? "

Henderson nodded and began dumping the money into the bag. His eyes dropped below the polished ledge of the window to the brass-coloured alarm button. Forget it, he told himself. What will playing hero get me? My name in the papers? He stuffed the rest of the money into the bag and began drawing the string.

" Hold on," said the man. " You're not finished. Let's have that money on the table behind you."

Henderson nodded, turned slowly, and reopened the bag. He swept the currency inside, marvelling at the incongruity of his thoughts. It's too hot in here. Why doesn't Powers put in air-conditioning? Thursday morning. Have to get a haircut this afternoon.

He handed the man the bag, and again had the feeling that he had seen him before. He studied the narrow, bright eyes, the pocked skin, the white scar tissue along the sallow jaw.

The man pulled the bag's string tight with his teeth. Two missing in the lower jaw, Henderson thought. Then he watched as the man walked quickly away from the counter, moved across the bank, and spun through the revolving door. The man was running when he reached the pavement.

The whole thing had taken less than a minute. Henderson looked round the small bank. The two tellers were calmly checking file cards; Powers was patting the shoulder of an old lady in his private office. Henderson smiled slightly, amused by his own detachment, and pressed the alarm button . . .

Powers handed him a glass of water. The bank was closed, the venetian blinds had been lowered against the white noon light.

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A plainclothes man was sprinkling powder over the ledge of the teller's window.

"How do you feel, Henderson?" Powers asked him.

Henderson smiled. "All right." He liked the grey, worried look on Powers' face. Maybe this afternoon would be a perfect time to ask him for that rise.

"Henderson?" A big, awkward-moving man had entered the office. "Lieutenant Pisano, Robbery," he said with authority. "You O.K.?"

Henderson decided he would feign the weak, frightened bank teller. Pisano seemed to want that, anyway. "I'm pretty shaky, Lieutenant. That was a terrible experience."

"Must have been," Pisano said sympathetically. "What'd he look like?"

Henderson watched him open a neat leather notebook. Amused, he debated whether he should give a wrong description, just for the hell of it. He decided not to; they might eventually catch the man. "He was tall," Henderson said finally. "Average-looking. That's really about all I can tell you."

"Suppose you think hard," Pisano said.

Henderson rebelled against the man's tone. He didn't like the superior attitude. "Sorry, Lieutenant. My mind's a blank."

Powers was still nervous. "Try to think, Henderson."

"What was he wearing?" Pisano asked.

"I really don't remember. I think he had a scar on his face, though."

Pisano jotted it down. "Whereabouts was this scar?"

"On his jaw."

Another entry. "What about his voice? Any accent?"

"I don't know. Like you and me."

Pisano closed the notebook. "O.K. Let me have your address and phone number. We might have a few photos we'll want you to look at."

Henderson gave him the information. "I've a splitting headache, Lieutenant," he added. "Have you finished with me?"

Pisano nodded. He looked at Powers and went over to the fingerprint man.

"You'd better take the rest of the day off," Powers said. "We're going to close up anyway."

Henderson nodded. He stood up and pretended a feeling of faintness.

"Hey, you'd better take it easy," Powers said.

"I'll be all right. See you tomorrow morning at nine sharp."

"But if you're not feeling well tomorrow, perhaps . . ."

"No, that's all right." He turned to Powers. Now was as

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good a time as any. " Listen, Mr. Powers, I was wanting to talk to you. I've been here eight months now . . ."

It was warm in his apartment and he turned on the fan. In the kitchen he stripped off his jacket and poured himself a glass of cold milk. He was feeling reasonably good. Powers had agreed to a five-dollar rise; no protest whatsoever.

He went into the bedroom, where it was cooler, and stretched out on the bed. He had the robbery to thank. Powers had lowered his defence because of it and had been wide open for the rise. Maybe he should have asked for ten bucks.

While lying on the bed, his conscious mind at rest, he suddenly remembered where he had seen the holdup man. Startled and pleased, he swung his legs over the edge of the bed and sat there for a moment, thinking. There had been a café on the other side of town, where he had eaten regularly the previous year. And behind the counter at the grill had been a tall, powerful man with pockmarked skin and scar tissue.

Henderson prodded his memory. The face of the grill-cook merged with the face of the man in the bank. They were the same.

He got to his feet and went back to the kitchen, turning off the fan. I wonder if he's still there? he thought. Then he saw his jacket thrown over the back of a chair. He picked it up and stroked the material aimlessly with his fingers. It was still fine out, no sign of rain. Why not check on the guy? He had a free afternoon with nothing else to do. And it might be interesting. Abruptly, he put on his jacket and went to the door . . .

The Edgewood Café was almost empty in mid afternoon. The owner was listening to the radio and the hired helps were frying themselves beefburgers on the grill.

Henderson sat down at the counter and ordered a cup of coffee. " Where's the guy who works the grill? " he asked the owner.

" Wallace? Away ill today. He'll be back tomorrow."

Henderson dug a coin from his pocket and put it on the counter. " I owe him some money. Thought he'd be in."

" Tomorrow," said the man. He took the coin.

" Any place I can reach him? "

An elderly Negro turned from the grill. " Lives over on Walnut. 316."

" He got a phone over there, do you know? "

" There's a phone in the hall. Turner 6–6132."

Henderson smiled. " You're well informed."

The Negro grinned back. " Owes me money, man. He oughta stop playin' cards. He's just plain stupid."

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Henderson finished his coffee and left.

There was a drugstore across the street from Wallace's building. Henderson dialled the Turner number and counted the rings. The sixth was cut short. "Hullo?"

"Wallace?"

There was a short pause. "Who's that?"

"A friend."

"You've got the wrong number, friend."

"I don't think so. Let's talk about money, Wallace." There was no answer. "You still there?"

"Who is that?"

Henderson paused. It sounded like the same voice, but he couldn't be sure. "You don't know me. But I know you, Wallace. I even know where you were this morning."

"What are you talkin' about?"

"Suppose you meet me. Let's say at—" Henderson checked his watch—"four o'clock. That's five minutes from now. At the corner of Walnut and Third."

"Now look—"

"All I have to do is drop another dime into this phone and call the police."

There was a long pause. "O.K.," Wallace said. "Four o'clock. Walnut and Third." He hung up.

Henderson replaced the receiver and left the booth. At the front of the drugstore was a large glass window that overlooked the street and the adjacent houses. He bought a packet of cigarettes and stationed himself by the window, keeping his eyes on the door of number 316. A few minutes later a man came out and walked down the steps to the street.

Henderson smiled, recognising the powerful frame and the sallow face. He waited until the man had turned the corner and then he left the drugstore.

He checked the number on the hall phone and then tried the door at the end of the dark corridor. It was locked. He stood for a brief moment with his hand on the knob, watching where the rickety staircase melted in shadows. Wallace would probably be gone at the most ten minutes.

Henderson hurled his body at the door. Again. The third time the flimsy lock gave and he stumbled, almost falling, into the room. It was a cramped cubicle, papered in bilious purple, and a smeared window overlooked a tangle of alleys and back yards.

Henderson went over to the bed and ripped off the sheets, tossed the mattress on the floor. He opened the drawers of a cheap pine bureau, but most of them were empty. There was nothing in the wardrobe except some clothes hangers and a small

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suitcase. The suitcase contained nothing but a pair of socks.

He came back to the centre of the room and scanned the walls for some area of concealment. It was dim in the room and he found himself wishing for more light. Then he looked up. A glass lighting fixture hung on three chains from the ceiling.

Smiling, Henderson climbed on the bed and swung at the light bowl. His fingertips brushed the base. He jumped and swung again, this time catching it with the side of his hand. The bowl bounced and tilted, and then a cotton bag slid out and fell to the floor. Henderson sprang from the bed and opened the drawstring of the bag. It was filled with the bank money.

Henderson checked his watch—five more minutes—and looked around. He'd need something to put the bag in; he couldn't carry it around as it was. Then he remembered the suitcase in the wardrobe. He took it out, stuffed in the bag, and closed the clasps. A few minutes later he was descending the stairs, swinging the suitcase and whistling softly.

His nerves, exhilarated by the afternoon's experience, needed calming. After walking the streets for a while, he went into a bar and took a seat in a corner, wedging the suitcase tightly between his legs. He ordered a drink and sat nursing it, thinking back over the past hour. It had been so easy, so incredibly easy. He didn't remember at what point he had decided to take the money, but it didn't matter. It was all over now. The only moment of danger had been in the room with the possibility of Wallace returning early, but that was in the past.

Henderson left the bar after a second drink and took a bus home, watching the warm dusk come down, the growing neon. He would have to hide the money for a while—eight months, perhaps a year. The precaution would be worth it. Then it would be his to spend on the car, the trip to Europe, the women.

He smiled at the beautiful irony of the situation. Wallace was powerless; he could never go to the police and report the robbery. The money had been twice stolen.

He got off the bus a few blocks before his stop and walked slowly, enjoying the twilight. When he reached his street, a black car pulled up to the kerb. "Henderson?"

He stopped abruptly, his hand tightening on the suitcase. The driver was a stout, middle-aged man, someone he had never seen before. But Pisano was sitting beside him, looking through the lowered window. "We've just been to your apartment," he said. His eyes dropped to the suitcase. "You planning on going away or something, Henderson?"

"No, Lieutenant. I was walking home." He lifted the suitcase. "I just have some things in here that I picked up in town."

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"Mind coming down to the police station with us? It won't take more than an hour."

"The station? What for?"

"Routine stuff. Hop in."

Henderson shifted uneasily on the kerb. "Well, could I drop off this suitcase? No sense carting it along."

"Bring it with you. We're in a hurry."

Henderson opened the rear door and climbed in. He put the suitcase on the floor, rested his feet on top of it.

The stout man started the engine and pulled away from the kerb. Pisano turned round and studied Henderson. "How do you feel?"

"Much better, thanks." He leaned forward. "What do you want with me at the station?"

"Routine," Pisano said. "We think maybe we can clear this thing up tonight."

He turned back and was silent for the rest of the ride.

Henderson sat in what seemed to be a small, dim auditorium. There was a long platform in the front, containing a speaker's stand and a microphone. The area was garishly lit by a string of powerful lights recessed in the ceiling.

Pisano moved past Henderson and sat down next to him. "Would you move that suitcase?" he asked. "It's blocking the gangway."

Henderson nodded. He picked it up and set it on the empty seat beside him. "What's going to happen?" he said.

"There'll be half a dozen men coming out on that platform. I want you to take a good look at them. Tell me if anyone seems familiar."

A uniformed policeman came from a doorway and stood at the speaker's stand. He said into the microphone, "All right, let's get moving, boys. You won't melt under the lights. Let's go."

Henderson watched six men shamble out and stand lounging against the rear wall. This should be rather amusing, he thought. They must have combed Skid Row for these bums. Feeling relaxed for the first time since Pisano picked him up, he took out a cigarette and lit a match. And then his head jerked up. Across six feet of empty chairs in the darkened room his eyes met those of Wallace, the last man on the platform.

"What's wrong?" Pisano said eagerly. "You recognise someone?"

"No," Henderson said. It was difficult keeping his voice normal. The match, raised to his lips, burnt brightly, illuminating his face. He started to shake it out with numb fingers, but

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not before Wallace lowered his gaze. Panic-stricken, Henderson watched the man stare at the suitcase on the seat beside him. He saw recognition break over Wallace's face, and then anger. He dropped the match, still flaming.

Pisano was looking at him. "You sure, Henderson?"

"Yes."

The policeman on the platform was having each man step forward and remove his hat if he wore one. He asked several of them questions and received abrupt, surly answers. Eventually Wallace stepped up, still staring through the lights at Henderson.

"Your name?" the policeman asked.

"Wallace."

"Your full name, Wallace."

"Art Wallace." He brought a hand up to shade his eyes.

"Take your hand away from your face!"

Wallace dropped it. His mouth twisted in a quiet, growing anger.

"Nothing, huh?" Pisano asked.

Henderson lowered his head. "No."

Pisano stood up. The six men were filing out. "Well," he said, "maybe the next time." He shook his head. "I really thought one of these babies was our boy. They were all involved in bank jobs in the past. Picked 'em up this afternoon. It only goes to show."

The room was now empty except for the two of them and the policeman on the platform. "Are you holding those men?" Henderson asked.

"No, they'll be released in a few minutes. Nothing to hold them on."

Henderson got to his feet slowly. He groped towards the aisle. "Can—I go now, Lieutenant?"

"Sure. We'll probably have a new batch for you tomorrow. Pick you up at the bank."

Henderson lifted the suitcase. It felt heavier, almost a burden.

"Get some rest," Pisano said. "You don't look too good."

He nodded. "Good night, Lieutenant."

"'Night. Sorry to bring you down here on a wild goose chase, but you never know."

Henderson moved to the door. "Could—you give me a lift back?"

"Afraid not, I think the cars are tied up. And I'll be here for a couple more hours. Take a cab. We'll reimburse you tomorrow. I wouldn't wander around this neighbourhood; it's a pretty bad one, especially at night."

Henderson stepped out of the door. He stood in a small,

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brick alleyway. He hurried along it and emerged on the pavement beside the police station. A block away a few cars moved sluggishly on a dim thoroughfare. He walked quickly towards it.

Have to get away from here, he thought, looking over his shoulder. Wallace spotted me and recognised his damn suitcase. Everything's in his favour now. I didn't identify him. He could kill me and take back the money; the police would never suspect him again. All because I didn't point him out.

He reached the street and stopped, looking in both directions. There were no taxis or buses. The neighbourhood was deserted; it was a good few miles from the main arteries of the city. And Wallace, having been released, was probably looking for him.

Henderson turned, hurried off, the suitcase dragging at his ankles. He headed down a lane of shabby, closed buildings. Something moved at the end of the block. A man's figure.

Henderson swung round and started in the opposite direction. He would go back to the police station; he had been a fool to leave in the first place. They had phones. He could call a taxi from there. Henderson looked round. Was the man a block or two behind him? To his right? He could hear footsteps approaching.

He cut into a sidestreet, stumbled into a dustbin, and sent it clanging across the kerb. Buildings again, high and black, on either side. The sky was dark, starless.

Henderson started running. There seemed to be no end to the street. He heard, close behind him, the accelerated tap of feet echoing the sound of his own. He tried to go faster, but he suddenly felt dead tired. Finally he stopped, pressing himself against the brick wall of a building.

A shadow appeared, lengthening on the pavement, touching the bottom of the wall. Henderson turned his face to the bricks, still trying to draw concealment from them. The footsteps came up behind him and stopped. Henderson dropped the suitcase. "Look, Wallace—" he said. He turned round.

Lieutenant Pisano went over to the desk and looked down at the short, chunky boy who sat in the shaft of light from the overhead lamp. "O.K.," he said, "let's get it straight. You followed him, you tried to take his wallet, and when he put up a struggle you stabbed him."

The boy looked up. His face was dirty. "He didn't fight me. He just started laughin' as soon as he saw who I was. Laughin' and laughin'. I told him to keep quiet. I told him."

"But he didn't, so you stabbed him."

The boy's face dropped forward on his hands. Pisano walked to a table. Displayed on it was a suitcase, a wallet, several

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coins, a handkerchief, and a packet of cigarettes. Pisano opened the wallet. "Three bucks. You killed him for three bucks."

"I didn't mean to."

"Shut up!" Pisano felt sick. If he hadn't brought Henderson to the station, if he had given him transport home . . . He dropped the wallet on the table. "Take him downstairs," he told a uniformed policeman who stood near the door. "And file these things until Henderson's kin picks them up."

The policeman crossed to the boy. "On your feet, son."

Aimlessly, Pisano dropped the coins through his fingers. He picked up the handkerchief and looked at it, shaking his head. Then he began to unfasten the clasps of the suitcase.

"I didn't mean it," said the boy, starting for the door. "He must've been crazy, laughin' like that. He thought I was somebody else, too. Kept callin' me Wallace."

Lieutenant Pisano was silent. He stood looking into the open suitcase. Then he turned to the boy, his face thoughtful. "Wallace . . . ?" he said with growing comprehension . . .

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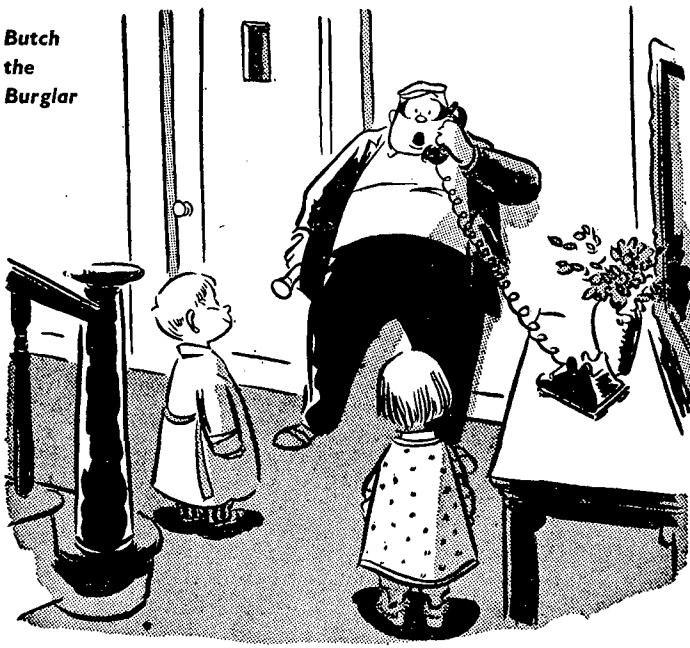

"Ma, did I have the mumps when I was a little boy?"

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DOWNFALL OF EVANS THE PUB

" I've taken a day off," he said recklessly

BY JOHN BALDWINSON

YOUNG Evans the Pub woke up on Sunday wondering what was the matter, trying to feel grim, and for an awful moment not being able to.

A sheet of bright sunlight lay over his bed and on to his face, and while he looked, dazed, round the room his work and learning seemed very far away. He thought hard about what he had learnt, and about the sinners and drunkards in the valley, and about the pub here that his father kept joylessly and he would too, and finally he did it.

With a snap his mind shut the sun out of the room and he refused himself five more minutes in bed. He got up grimly, washed hard in cold water, and by the time he came to his stiff black-and-white clothes his mouth was going again to the shape of his teetotal pub-keeping father's.

It was the suit that did it, because he felt all right and normal when he looked at the stiff black Sunday trousers and the hard black Sunday coat that were right for him. There was a moment, just before stepping into the scratchy pants, when he looked at the short golden hairs on his legs and wondered, but it didn't last long and he glared in the mirror with satisfaction at the lines of his face as he combed his hair hard down with water.

Young Evans the Pub lived with his father these eight years, mother dead since he was ten, and the hard and rigid simplicity of their life was set all about with complexities, because it is hard to be simple deliberately. Sometimes Young Evans had a longing for chocolate, but weaknesses of the flesh were good, his father said, because they gave you the chance to deny yourself and be the better for it, not like his customers.

Young Evans walked downstairs practising his sniff. Old Pub had a beauty down his long, thin, pointed nose. It was a cold, hard sniff, and it conveyed anything at all that Old Pub wanted it to.

" He makes that nose *sing* when he feels eloquent," a chapel

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man who should never have been in the pub at all had once said admiringly, and Young Evans, twelve at the time and very imaginative, had wondered if his father could sniff *Bread of Heaven* and would it be tenor or bass?

Young Evans took a crumbled piece of chocolate from his fluffy jacket-pocket and nibbled it quickly. Old Pub wouldn't be up a while yet, and the tea, bread and dripping, the old every-morning grace-said breakfast, would cover up the chocolate. Then he remembered Old Pub was away at a conference of publicans, no less, miles away in a great big sinful town and won't be back till Tuesday!

Young Evans gulped down the rest of the chocolate, sat down quickly in a straight and hard-backed chair, and pulled the instructions out of his pocket. For the first time ever, Young Evans alone would keep the pub when it opened again after the Sunday drought . . .

He smoothed the paper and scanned every word, his lips moving gently as he saw himself behind the bar of the little tin-and-timber pub, looking in scorn at the rows of sinners come to wallow in thin bitter beer. He would show them.

Young Evans would follow the footsteps all right, planting his shoes, as hard as though carved with an axe they were, exactly where his dad's had been. That was all settled long since. Stay at the Grammar School for certificates, no longer, it's a waste of time if you can't go away for a fine B.A., and a year since at Father's knee and the lessons from Old Plaster Baldwin, a fine publican in his time.

No one knew how he got his name; certainly not from drinking because he'd sworn off the market day that someone got mixed up, and a flock of sheep poured in at one door of the pub and a crowd of swine at the other. He was educated too.

Young Evans folded the paper, saw how the creases were full of dirt from a week's carrying around and reading five times a morning. Time to get the bus to chapel.

Look out the window, sun shining, how dare it? The place would be thick with sunbeams, streaming with gold dust, and dust in the old preacher's voice droning on like the very sound of summer . . .

Young Evans tightened his tie to choke his treason, fastened his jacket by all three buttons, composed his face like a coming young man (tomorrow) and stepped out the front door. Banged the door smartly, using the door to make a full stop and prepare for a good morning's devotion.

Then a bird in the little stony garden's solitary tree stood up and thrilled its heart out to him.

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Young Evans looked at it and laughed.

" Bloody tweet-tweet to you," he said.

He never quite knew why it was that he walked straight past the bus stop, on into the village, and through the other side up the hill. Despite the looks and comments in the village—women in their doorways, nothing better to do than weigh up one soap-flake against the other, strip a reputation or two, and only then cook the dinner: " Where's Young Evans the Pub off to, then? Should be on the bus, you know, the twenty past nine, every Sunday, yes? "—he knew it was happening, although he hadn't heard it out loud, but he kept on, past the last straggle of stone houses and up the hill.

What lay up and over the hill? Nothing, only Jones the Farm's farm, snuggling in the dip, and Jones and his family weren't quite right. Never in the chapel from one year's end to the next, and what a lovely girl the daughter! Didn't seem right, did it? Look at old Owen, never missed a meeting in forty-seven years and that girl of his, homely.

Young Evans wondered too, what he was doing. Calling on the sinners, trying to get them to chapel? Old Voice-of-Conscience Evans? Oh yes, look at Young Evans about to convert Jones, a lifetime's agnostic if not an atheist, and half the valley fully expected the Devil to ride up in person to collect the night the old man died.

You've got to hand it to Young Pub, just like his father, never thinks of the size of the job. And by the time he was half-way down the hill on the other side he fully believed himself that such was indeed his business. That was why he stopped at the shed in the yard, a safe half-furlong from the back of the house, having glimpsed the beautiful daughter through an open door.

Deeply interested in the state of her soul, Young Evans watched for a good five minutes while she went from one hen's nest to another, filling her skirt with eggs, and surely he never saw that her legs were bare right up the front where she'd tucked it up to hold them.

When she saw him, five-and-threepence worth of Standards dropped on the floor, but Young Evans just said, " Good morning," and she didn't say a word for looking at him.

" I mean, it *is* a good morning, isn't it? " said Young Evans, smiling like a film star and thrilled with the quickness of his wit.

Till she said, " It was, but my wicked father beats me for an egg broke."

" Broken," said Young Evans automatically, and then his

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jaw dropped. "He doesn't really, does he? I mean, beat you? You're too big to beat, too pr—"

She smoothed her skirt down and smiled with satisfaction.

"My name's Megan," she said, "and he doesn't really, but he often says he should. I'm seventeen."

Young Evans stood with his mouth still open for a while, trying to catch up with her.

"I'm Young Evans," he said weakly after a moment.

"I know. Young Pub. Have you come to convert me then? Or is it trying to drum up weekday custom you are?"

"Maybe I'll manage to keep a pub better than some people sow a field that call themselves farmers!" he said hotly, and regretted it, for her face went red, and didn't everyone know that Jones was no farmer at heart but read far too many books?

"And maybe I won't if there's something I like doing better," he said. Her lips smiled and then, better than that, her eyes.

"Found anything you like better, then?"

"No!" he said, like that, and looked away. "You busy?"

"Why, Young Evans?"

"I've taken a day off," he said recklessly, "I'm not going to chapel and I want someone to walk by the river with." He was breathing fast, mind you.

Lightly: "Anyone do, Mr. Evans, or someone special had you in mind?"

"Come with me, Megan." Something told him it was not a good thing to ask like that, and he went into the shed and took her by the hand. It was warm and small, and harder than he'd have thought.

He had her out of the door before she said quietly, "Shut it behind you or the hens'll be out." Then he knew he was on the right track.

But she snatched her hand away and said, "Forward, aren't you, Young Evans, when we haven't even been introduced? Maybe I should ask my father before I walk by the river with you, do you think?"

Poor Young Evans was puzzled, and for a moment the joyless little pub rose in his mind like a great rock, safe and very, very predictable. But a glimpse of something white down the open front of her man's blue shirt drove it clean out his head, poor lad, and the next thing he knew they were racing across a field and down a dip to the river bank. He didn't quite know how he'd managed it, and to be truthful he hadn't, she had, but the end result was the same anyway.

According to the stories he'd sneaked into bed and read in the long summer evenings—actually women's magazines, which

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were all he could ever find in the way of illicit reading matter, and from which he'd formed all his ideas on girls, love, sex and the like—they should have thrown themselves laughing on the grass and been engaged from the first sweet stolen kiss, but it wasn't like that at all.

Megan got there first, owing to his shoes being hard and heavy like his father's, and she sat demurely on the bank, spread her skirt very modestly around her till only her toes could be seen, and patted the grass at a safe distance away.

"You may sit down, Young Evans, and tell me the story of your life."

Young Evans, mad with desire and with the pub and the chapel never farther from his thoughts, sat down at the safe distance indicated, much to her disappointment, and couldn't think of anything to say, much to his. They sat and watched the water run past.

"Let's play dares," said Megan comfortably after a while, and Young Evans looked at her surprised.

"Why?"

"Don't you know any better than to ask a lady for reasons!" she cried angrily. And then she said, "Because it'd be better than sitting here like one o'clock half struck is why. I dare you to take your cardboard coat off and try to look as if you were enjoying yourself."

Young Evans shrugged, but tactfully so that she couldn't see because he was learning fast, and took off his jacket.

"You shouldn't make personal remarks about people's clothing," he said primly, and then sat bolt upright. He took off his tie, stuffed it in his pocket, threw the stiffeners from his collar into the river, and rolled his sleeves up. He laughed at the expression on her face. "Young Evans is on holiday!"

"It's an improvement," she said, and he had the wit just to say thank you.

Then he lay down on the grass and said, "Tell me your story first, please, Megan."

"Nothing to tell," she said, very matter-of-fact, and pulled up a bit of grass to chew. Her white teeth worked at it, and her brown face crinkled up like a rabbit's. "I used to sit behind you at school, you know."

Young Evans was delighted. "You remember that?" He covered his eyes from the sun and thought for a while. Then he looked sideways at her, very quickly, and sat up and took her by the hand again. "Megan?"

Not looking at him: "Yes?"

"We still playing?"

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"Not here," she said quickly. "Come on—" She got up and held out her hand. "Oh, bring your coat!"

She led him away down the bank, along the edge, and like mice past a bush of bramble tangled to within inches of the water, and suddenly they were in a little clear patch right in the heart of it. He looked around him, and it was a very secret place.

"I used to come here when I'd been spanked when I was a little girl," she said. "There's no one in the whole world knows about it but me."

"And me," he said. He dropped his jacket on the ground and never even heard the dry rustle of the instructions in his pocket, for all that it called out in the voice of his father and echoed round and round the Saloon and Public.

"Megan?" he said, and when she turned towards him he kissed her gently on the lips without raising his hands.

"I dare you to do that again," she said very quietly, and he did.

"Properly," she said, and he did, and it seemed to go on for ever, and when it finished they were sitting on the ground again with her skirt not quite so demure. Because it was she that had showed him how to (properly) and it's difficult to think of everything at once.

They sat and looked at one another for a while, and it must have been something about Young Evans and the way he looked and especially the light in his eyes when he looked at her that made her do it.

She took a deep breath and, before it was properly in, said her piece with the mad, quick courage that comes from knowing that if you stop and think about what you're going to say you won't ever say it at all.

"Young Evans—" and that was a caress— "you're not the first boy I've been—been by the river with—you know?"

She was breathless with the honesty of what she'd said, looking at her feet. There was no other way to say it, and no way to undo it now, but she was glad that it was done. Now she was frightened that Young Evans would want no more of her, him being brought up strict chapel and all.

Young Evans weighed it all up in the splittest of seconds and very intelligently decided that he didn't care, or rather that it didn't matter. But he had his pride, and he said, "Megan, this *is* a secret place, though?"

Relief flooded into her face as she moved towards him.

"I promise promise promise promise promise promise promise promise that not even my little sister knows about it. Oh, Young Evans . . ."

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They fell back on his jacket, and after a little while they spread it on the ground—not playing dares this time—and neither one of them heard the terrible rustles and crackles of the paper.

That most pleasurable of pains was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to Young Evans in the whole of his life, and her cool arms round him, soft that were so hard and fierce a moment ago, were the second, and the butterfly-kiss that had been a bite and him with the mark to prove it was the third.

They lay in the sun and looked at each other and didn't say anything at all for a long, long time. Then it was Megan that spoke.

"What about keeping the pub and going to chapel, Young Evans?"

She was teasing and he knew it, but he had been asking himself the same thing since he'd collected his wits after his first little death. The question was only a formality, of course.

He just said lightly, "I never did go much on the smell of beer, and if that was a good example of sin I don't wonder there's not so many in chapel these days."

Megan smiled, not so much at the joke which was pretty weak, but with pleasure at Young Evans, and what had happened, and at the sun and the morning and herself.

Young Evans was free of the question too, for all he'd spoken lightly. If he didn't know what he was going to do, at least he knew what he wasn't. He gazed up at the sky with little, half-grown plans chasing themselves round and round his head. He squeezed Megan suddenly, and when she smiled at him questioningly, he said, "I love you."

"I love you too," she said, and smiled again at the big, round eyes he made. "Really and truly."

"For ever?"

"Of course, if you want me."

"But the—you said—" He stopped and swallowed. He'd have killed himself, cut his own heart out and eaten it, rather than finish what he was going to say. Like all good women, she knew what it was anyway.

"I've loved you since I sat behind you in school," she said, "and I used to watch the way your hair grows on the back of your neck. You've got the nicest back of the neck I've ever seen—but oh, it was a long time waiting!"

"And now you'll always love me and nobody else?"

"Always and nobody, ever and never."

Young Evans gazed hard at her, his mind fluttering like a butterfly in a jamjar. His mouth opened and shut as he tried

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to think of something to say, something so very big and grand that it would say all he wanted it to. He searched through the file, index, contents, and catalogue of his entire and very good vocabulary; he remembered every word of every story in every women's magazine. His mind leapt and skidded over all the things he wanted to say: I love you, Megan, and a thousand times more for you loving me, and how can the pub still be standing after this morning, and all about moving down to some big town and sending for brown, beautiful Megan, and oh the times they would have in bed on a Sunday morning. Every paragraph, sentence, phrase, and word he had ever known flashed by and wouldn't do.

Young Evans was hurt and puzzled under the wonderful bright new love. He pulled back his head and looked at her again. "Megan?" he said. "You know there aren't any words? There just aren't any big enough to say it."

She laughed and stroked his beseeching face. With two fingers she touched his mouth at each corner and stretched it into the beginnings of a smile.

"I know," she said. "There never have been, ever."

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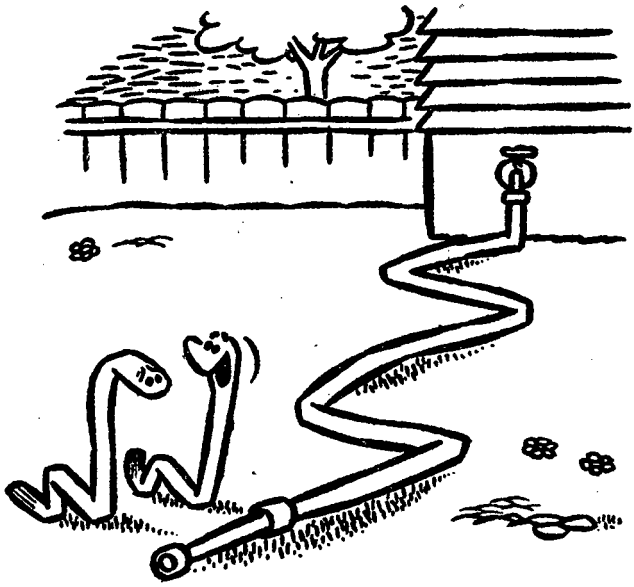

"Better not wake him up—he spits."

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BLACK STAR

Jan used to come to her singing—
tall, lithe, sinewed as a coil of rope

BY RODNEY GEDYE

SARIE reached the top of the spur and straightened up, bracing her bare feet against the slope of the rock. Before her lay the fishing beach, with a line of boats—bright and big-bellied as giant puff-fish thrown up to die—basking above the highwater mark.

A warm breeze, sweeping up the smell of Diesel oil, new paint, and rotting fish-heads, threaded light fingers through the hair behind her ears, and smoothed the faded cotton dress against her body. A body that was young and firm, and curved as a woman's should be.

For a while she just stood on the rock, listening to the sounds of work and laughter blown from the boats. Then, cupping her hands about her mouth, she whistled. Hard, like a man, drawing the sound out and up and down short.

The men looked towards her, and she waved. And when they showed no sign of having seen her, she waved again. But one by one they turned back to work. The beach was suddenly very quiet, and even the wind seemed to drop away.

All right, she thought, all right—pretend you haven't seen me. And climbing down to the beach, she started across to the boats. As she passed along them, picking her way through the litter of crayfish pots and stretched nets, head bent and watching the sun-baked sand pressing up between her toes, she felt the men staring after her.

They were happy people, simple and direct. Full of laughing gay friendliness, they teased her often, but never for long; first one breaking in and then another, all white smiles and pretty words, as though she were the only girl in the village. This time it was different. The silence and disregard remained unbroken and frightening. It was studied, alien, like something reserved for women who had lost men at sea.

Reaching her father's boat, the girl hoisted herself over the side. The old man had his back to her and was bent over the open engine-housing.

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"What's wrong, Pa?" she asked with a smile; waiting for him to turn; expecting the big sly wink that would place him with her, against the rest.

He turned half towards her. The deep-lined brown face held an odd mixture of discomfort, perplexity, and sadness.

"Nothing—the fuel-pump—I was just checking the pump."

"Are you going out tonight?"

"Nee, I don't think so . . ." For a moment his eyes lifted to hers, as though he were searching them for the knowledge of something. And failing to find it, he looked away, rubbed his hands down the front of his soiled khaki shirt, and turned back to the engine.

"You had better get home," he said quietly.

Behind the words the girl sensed all she had seen in his face, and the wind that had warmed her on the rocks suddenly cut over the gunwale, striking cold and unfriendly through the thin dress.

Knowing that the thing he could not bring himself to tell her would have to wait, she left the beach and climbed the grey road that led up towards the shoulder of the headland. The way the men went home to their shacks, nesting in a cluster on the first rise of the mountains. The way Jan used to come to her, singing, tall and lithe, sinewed as a coil of rope. Jan, who had always been so proud of his strength, always so invincible . . .

Until that rain-blasted night when the men carried him up on a litter of oars and torn sail, and laid him gently on the kitchen table, his crushed arm draped across his chest. The night a black star had come to rest over Sarie for the first time in all her eighteen years.

After the accident they had carried him to her, because she was his promised woman, and it was a woman's place to care for her man when he was broken. But he was hurt beyond her aid. He needed the white hospital doctors, and they had come and taken him to Cape Town and cut off the dead arm. By the time he returned to the village, he was drinking away his fear of her pity, and so avoided her.

The other people treated him kindly at first, trying not to notice the empty sleeve, but he had drunkenly spat the kindness back in their faces. Soon they were turning away from him, and saying that the doctors had cut off his spirit too.

Sarie had told herself to wait; that her time was when the bitterness had eaten itself out of him. But before it could, he went back to Cape Town, with its easier money and cheap, rotgut brandy.

When she reached the shacks, she turned into the rusty-wire-fenced yard of the first one: a low whitewashed wood and

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corrugated iron building that leaned back against the slope and faced the sea across a patch of untended vegetables and stunted, wind-scrubbed peach trees.

The gate creaked closed behind her and, even before she had half crossed the yard, the old woman started shrilling, "Saaarie! Sarie!"

She sat in her usual place, over by the stove; old brown hands gripping the arms of a rickety bentwood chair; jigging herself backwards and forwards. As the girl entered the kitchen—and although it was dark and she needed a little time for her eyes to adjust from the afternoon sun—she noticed that the movement was faster than usual, more excited.

"Where you been?" the old woman whined at her. "All day you been gone. Gone and left me with no one."

"I went down to the town."

"Ja. Every chance you get, you go off and leave me alone. Every chance. But you wait, dolla. Something will happen to me one day, or maybe—" the eyes hooded, the whine changing to a singsong—"maybe something will happen to you. Ja, dolla, and you won't be here where I can help you."

Sarie stiffened and a tiny muscle started ticking in her cheek. "All right. Like what?" she asked.

But the old woman was looking down at her crushed, black bodice and pulling it straight, all expression gone from her face.

"Nothing, nothing. I was just thinking maybe . . ." she said as if to herself, and jigged slowly backwards and forwards.

The girl shrugged, and turning to a small window drew a scarf from the pocket of her dress. Her fingers shook as she untied the coins knotted in one corner, and dropped them into a cracked vase standing on the sill.

"I took some oysters down to the hotels. They paid me seven shillings," she said evenly.

"Huh!" The old woman was bent on mischief, and struck again, her voice oily and bitter as cascara. "What you want to buy with it? A wooden arm, maybe?"

And when there was no answer: "What's it like, dolla— Love with one arm?"

Sarie whirled. "You keep your filthy tongue off—"

The old woman's high, screamed laughter filled the room, flooding out Sarie's words on a torrent of malice and triumph. She had struck well, and the girl stood glaring at her, too tense with anger to move; oh, to beat the withered face until the eyes mocked no more and the pink gums were still for ever!

Quite suddenly the laughter stopped. The old body thrust itself forward. The wrinkled, vulture neck stuck out. The chin

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gleamed wet with saliva. "Well, you'll never see him again. Cause what he done they'll hang him for, one arm 'n'all! Ja, my dolla."

Sarie heard the words, and wanted to tell the old woman she was lying; but the kitchen was all dim, and she couldn't see the chin any longer, and . . . It was like standing up quickly after bending in the sun too long. You told yourself not to feel it, but you did. And the old sow wouldn't stop shouting; it was hard to hear when she shouted like that.

". . . smashed his head like a snook, brains 'n'—"

"Shut up!"

Sarie saw the old woman's eyes pivot to the door; the flapping jaw go slack; the shrivelled body cringe back into the chair, small, quivering, weak. She spun round and threw herself into her father's arms, burying her face against his shoulder.

"Get out!"

She heard the chair creak, and a grunting, shuffling, animal sound that ended at the inner door. Then her father's hand was on her head, smoothing down her hair, and he was crooning softly as he had done when she was a child.

"My kindtjie, my klein liefste, moenie treur nie."

Deep, gasping sobs shook her body.

"What was she saying? Pa, what's happened to Jan?"

"He's in trouble, kleintjie—bad trouble."

She was too late! Her brain hammered the thought: A man must be allowed to work life out for himself, and only when he needs her can a woman help. But when he was in need of her help, he had not wanted it, and now it was too late.

"I must go to him," she said, pushing herself out of her father's arms and trying to force him away from the door.

"You can't. He's gone, run away."

She lifted her face up to look at him, her cheeks shiny from the tears smudged against his khaki shirt. And as he put out a hand to comfort her, she moved away round the table, feeling the fight draining out of her arms and out of her body.

In the corner a coffee-pot gleamed dully against the black iron of the stove. She picked it up and held it tight between her breasts. It was still warm. Holding it close to her, she opened the lid and closed it and opened it again while the tears dried on her cheeks.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Jan—I should've told you on the boat—he clubbed Old Hendriks and stole his money." The words trailed out, empty and defeated. "He came back from Cape Town this morning—drunk when he got off the bus, they say. About lunch-time, he

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went to Hendriks'—two men were there from the hotels buying mullet, and they told the police Jan looked pretty drunk and—and wild. Well, they left and then he . . ." His hand flipped up in a helpless little gesture. "They're getting a police dog from Cape Town tonight."

"And Hendriks is dead."

"Nee, nee! Did she say—?"

The girl spun to face him. Warm coffee slopped out of the pot and down the front of her dress.

"Then they won't—Pa, they won't hang him!"

And in her mind Sarie was shouting, Oh, Jan, Jan! I *can* help; I *can* help!

And she knew where to find him. Where he would hide when the brandy wore off, and he could see the size of what he had done. Up in the deep cleft in the cliff, screened by a tangle of shrub and vines, and overlooking the lagoon. A place they had played in: cooking mussels, exchanging first kisses—where he had asked her once, when he was just fourteen, to be his nooi, always. Where . . .

"I must find him first," she said.

Beyond the headland, the grey road dropped to a causeway bridging the shallow, silted mouth of a blind river. Open at high tide, it lapped back into the mountains, with banks rising steep and wooded from broken shores to twin lines of sheer cliff.

When Sarie reached it, the tide had fallen back with the setting sun, and the water lay quiet and dark as treacle. Leaving the road, and turning her back to the sea, she moved swiftly from one rock to another; surefooted as a cat; hardly testing a step before shifting her weight for the next. And as she moved, a legion of crabs scuttled away ahead.

Where the broken rock ended, she jumped down to a tiny strip of sand and crossed it to a high shelf that jutted out into the water. Reaching up, she explored the slippery face of the rock, feeling for the finger grips they had used as children. Then she stepped on to a narrow ledge and, carefully, moving a hand, a foot, worked her way to the corner and edged past it. There the ledge dipped into the water and ended.

Taking all her weight on her fingertips, she stretched out her left leg and felt beneath the surface for the narrow crack that cut back into the rock.

When she found it, she transferred her balance, stepped up to a higher foothold, pulled herself on to the top of the shelf, and walked along it towards the slope and the deeper shadow of the trees.

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Beneath them the dark was close and forbidding, and she climbed fast, digging her toes into the damp loam, and feeling ahead for something to hold, to pull herself up on—roots, tufts of grass, branches—until the cover broke, and she could see the cliff face towering black against the lighter sky.

The blood was pounding in her temples, and the scratches covering her arms and legs were alight with pain. But she stopped only long enough to draw breath and take her bearings. Looking across at the silhouette of the opposite bank, and then down to the curve of breakers at the mouth of the lagoon, she turned right and stumbled on.

A sudden, slight movement in the bushes ahead stopped her. Something sensed rather than seen. Breath frozen, she pressed herself against the face of the cliff. But the shadows were motionless and the only sound was the distant surge of the sea. Then she noticed a slight smell of wood smoke.

"Jan," she said softly. And when there was no answer again loudly, "Jan!"

A man stepped out of the shadows. In the half light she could see the empty sleeve tucked into the right pocket of his jacket.

"Go home, Sarie," he said.

"But—I've come to help you, Jan."

"Then go home."

And before she could answer, he ducked behind the bushes that hid the cleft.

It cut straight and narrow into the face, the floor rising sharply over tumbled rock, then broke to the left and widened to twice the span of a man's arms. Years of storm water, spilling down from the plateau above, had dammed silt against the rocks of the entrance and left a floor of fine, level earth that stretched back to where one of the walls had caved inwards. The result was a rough chamber, open to the sky.

When the girl entered, Jan was sitting on his heels beyond a small fire, his back towards the fall of rock. She moved forward timidly, expecting anger. But there was none. He sat quite still, watching the fire and ignoring her. His face, bronzed and moulded by the glow, smouldered like a coal against the shadows.

At last he looked up. The line of his mouth was thin and bitter; his dark eyes dancing flecks of firelight.

"And have you come to take me back?" he asked.

"Ja."

The corner of his mouth twisted up and he laughed.

"So they can give me money for killing an old bait seller?"

"He's not dead."

Her answer sounded flat and unimportant; but she was alert,

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seeing every flicker of emotion that crossed his face. As the tenseness went out of it, and his head and shoulders sagged, she stepped past the fire and dropped to her knees by his side.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. There's sixty pounds there," he said, nodding towards an old fibre suitcase near the entrance. "I'll go to Jo'burg, maybe."

"They're bringing dogs tomorrow."

"Ja. And tomorrow I'll be gone."

A dark shiny object caught the girl's eye, and she picked it out of the sand.

"Look—is it one of ours?"

He took the mussel shell from her and rubbed it against the lapel of his jacket, cleaning off the sand. Then he dropped it into the fire.

"Nee. Ours are all buried under the sand."

"Jan?"

"Ja."

"Please go back. Take back the money—before they come with the dogs." He turned his head to look at her, and she went on, her face eager with urgency, "Tell them you'd drunk too much. They won't be hard—not as if they caught you."

"They'll put me in gaol, nooi."

"What if they do? That's nothing. You'll soon be out again. Please, Jan. You'll see, everything will come out right. Everything. . ."

"Nee!"

"Please, Jan, please. We can marry—like we were going to—and we . . ."

He pushed up roughly, knocking her hard against the rock wall.

"For God's sake! Look at me, Sarie. Look!" he shouted, shaking the empty sleeve at her. "Do you think I'll grow another one? Do you think—"

"Please, Jan!"

"—I'll be a man again? I'm nothing; can't you see? I'll never work on the boats again—"

"No—no—no!" she screamed, her anger flaring against the acid that was corroding him; destroying the gay, carefree man she loved; reducing him to a snivelling, selfish dwarf. "You won't work a boat again—never! But there are other jobs, just as good—jobs that don't need two hands. Only, you can't see them—you see nothing but that sleeve. You're like a crab, Jan. A crab with its eyes turning in—a crab, not a man!" and then his face, staring at her from beyond the fire, blurred out—and she covered her face with her hands and wept.

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When she looked up again, he had left. And taken the suitcase with him. She wiped her tears on the hem of her dress and rose stiffly to her feet.

Outside it was quite light. The moon had risen, full and swollen, and the cliff face, the trees, the water of the lagoon, were painted in a thousand shades of silver-grey. She started down the slope, slipping and falling over the uneven surface, her mind and body numb and tired.

Reaching the edge of the rock shelf, she stood staring stupidly down at the water. There was a slight mist resting on the lagoon, the rock was wet and slippery, and the water seemed to be a long way down.

She climbed over the edge and down, until both her feet rested in the crack beneath the surface of the water. Pressing her body hard against the cold cliff face, she reached out for a new finger-hold, gripped, and swung her right foot for the sloping ledge on the corner. But as she started moving her body over, the foot slid up and off.

She grabbed back at the rock, clawing for a grip. Her nails scratched down the smooth wet wall, and then she was arching backwards, twisting like a cat. She hit the water face down; and a school of startled mullet broke the surface, leaping away into the mist.

As her head came up, she screamed. Again and again, until the terror and the blind panic choked her and her mind went blank; her body writhing instinctively against the grip of the rock, trap-like about her ankle.

There was nothing solid to dig her fingers into—to pull herself free. Just the water in her face, choking, going over her, beating away from her hands.

Then she was clawing into something, dragging it down. But her face wasn't in the water any longer, it was up against something hard and firm, and there was an iron band around her back, and the hold on her foot had eased.

When she looked up at him, he was smiling. Like a kid, she thought, and was angry. Because the taste of fear and salt water was still in her mouth.

"Slowly now, slowly, nooi," he said.

Feeling the strength of his arm holding her, his chest pressed against her cheek, she relaxed her body and the fingers clawing into his back.

"That's better. Now turn your foot and work it out."

She twisted round and pulled. Her foot felt free, then caught again.

"I can't. Turn me round farther," she said.

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But it was caught. She bent her head backwards to look at him. " It won't move," she said.

They came early; long before the shadows had drawn back from the lagoon. Three of them. The sergeant, a policeman from Cape Town with a big brown-black Dobermann, and the girl's father. Jan saw them coming, up among the trees, the way he had come the day before.

He called to them and his voice was harsh, as if covering fear. But when he spoke to the girl, the fear had passed. He spoke as gently as he had done throughout the night; comforting her against the cold and the beating pain in her leg.

" Everything will soon be over now, nooi; everything will soon be all right."

And hearing the way he said it, and the men on the beach, and her father splashing towards them, she knew it would. That the pain of the leg she had caught in the rock would soon be gone—and was worth the spirit of a man.

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PEARLS of the DEEP

Britons never, never, never shall be mar-ri-ed to a mermaid
At the bottom of the deep blue sea.

" Oh, will you come and live with me? And you shall have delight
In catching limpets all the day and eating them all night;
And lobsters in abundance in the palace where I am;
And I will come and be thy bride, and make thee seaweed jam."
The sailor-boy did one eye shut, and then did it unclose;
And with solemnity he put his thumb unto his nose;
And said, " Be bothered if I do, however much you sing;
You flabby little, dabby little, wetty little thing."

A. E. HOUSMAN, *The Mermaid*

Repulse

And now they were so close to the surface that if they had been in air, instead of water, Lucy could have spoken to them. There were men and women both. All wore coronets of some kind and many had chains of pearls. They wore no other clothes. Their bodies were the colour of old ivory, their hair dark purple. The King in the centre . . . looked proudly and fiercely into Lucy's face and shook the spear in his hand. His knights did the same. The faces of the ladies were filled with astonishment. Lucy felt sure that they had never seen a ship or a human being before—and how should they, in seas beyond the world's end where no ship ever came?

Almost at once Drinian said in a low voice:

" Turn round at once—that's right, with our backs to the sea. And don't look as if we were talking about anything important."

" Why, what's the matter? " said Lucy as she obeyed.

" It'll never do for the sailors to see *all that*," said Drinian.

C. S. LEWIS, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

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Nostalgic

Once she sate with you and me,
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea,
And the youngest sate on her knee.
She comb'd its bright hair, and she tended it well,
When down swung the sound of the far-off bell.
She sigh'd, she looked up through the clear green sea.
She said, " I must go, for my kinsfolk pray
In the little grey church on the shore today.
'Twill be Easter-time in the world—ah me !
And I lose my poor soul, Merman, here with thee."

MATTHEW ARNOLD, *The Forsaken Merman*

Danish Amphibians

When the great amber windows were opened, fishes would swim into these apartments; they swam straight up to the little princesses, ate from their hands, and allowed themselves to be caressed.

" Why have not we immortal souls? " asked the little mermaid.

" You must not think of that," answered her grandmother. " It is much better as it is. To appear handsome to them, the body must have two clumsy props which they call legs."

The little mermaid sighed and looked mournfully at the scaly part of her form, otherwise so fair and delicate.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN, *The Little Mermaid*

Lost Legend

. . . Out of those wallowing, moon-flecked waves
I saw a mermaid dive;
Head and shoulders above the wave
Plain as I now see you,
Combing her hair, now back, now front,
Her two eyes peeping through;
Calling me, " Sam ! "—quietlike—" Sam ! " . . .
But me . . . I never went
Making believe I kind of thought
'Twas someone else she meant . . .
Wonderful lovely there she sat,
Singing the night away,
All in the solitudinous sea
Of that there lonely bay.

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Sam*

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Doggone Dugong

Between Circe's Isle and Scylla swam the Sirens,
Luring silly, love-sick seamen to their death;
Their green bosoms, wet and starry, cleft the spindrift,
Tempting kisses crossed the waves on perfumed breath.
It seems sad to spoil Ulysses' simple story
Or to prove the poet Homer's facts were wrong,
But perhaps these lovely nymphs were halicoré—
Water-mammals that Malayans call dugong.

NICHOLAS HUSK, *Mermaid or Manatee*

Unwelcome

Suddenly Janet's eyes fixed.

"What's that?"

"That's my present for you," said George proudly, and he lifted it, with a bit of effort, on to the mantelpiece: an outsize bottle containing a fullsize mermaid. At least she was a three-foot mermaid, and that's as large as they need to come.

George tipped the bottle in lifting it, and the mermaid sank to the bottom, but she slowly righted herself, levelled, and undulated from stem to stern.

"Her name's Emma. Isn't she lovely? Only one in the country, I shouldn't wonder." And George smacked the mermaid encouragingly on her bottle. She rotated slowly, over and over, then brought her face close to the glass and gazed at them, unwinking.

JOAN AIKEN, *A Mermaid Too Many*

Caudal Up-endage

Say not the mermaid is a myth,
I knew one once named Mrs. Smith.
She stood while playing cards or knitting;
Mermaids are not equipped for sitting.

OGDEN NASH, *The Mermaid*

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GENTLEST OF THE BROTHERS

" There's only one way you can stop me," Kevin McCarty said

BY DAVID ALEXANDER

KEVIN McCARTY was a lay brother at the seminary, happily pruning rosebushes in the institution's gardens, when word arrived that his young sister, Rose Kathleen, had died by her own hand with mortal sin upon her soul. The death alone was a tragic thing, but even more terrible were the letter and package that Kevin McCarty received on the first day of the laying out. The letter and package were addressed by Rose Kathleen's own hand, the same hand that had lifted the deadly poison to her pretty mouth.

Poor Kevin read the letter over many times and it was a long and shocking message his sister had written down and mailed, along with the package, just before she took her life.

Kevin had believed that Rose Kathleen, the last relative he had in all the world since his mother's death, was an actress in the theatre. He did not quite approve of her occupation, but after all it was honest work and she was young and radiant and a pretty thing to see, and there was no real harm in letting people look at her there behind the footlights, for no one was ever hurt by looking upon radiance and beauty. But Rose Kathleen had not really been an actress, it seemed.

She had been a " dancer." The quotation marks were her own. She had appeared in specialty numbers at Rory O'Bannon's night club called The Fig Leaf and her letter said that " dancers " there hardly danced at all but stood with blue light on them and bared their bodies before the drunken customers. Also, after hours, the " dancers " were forced to entertain the customers who had the wherewithal to pay them for their favours. Rose Kathleen had done it all because in some unaccountable way she had fallen in love with Rory O'Bannon.

Kevin McCarty knew Rory O'Bannon all too well. He had grown up on the same twisting street in Greenwich Village with him. Even as a youth Rory had been a bully, an oversized lad

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with a wild light in his eyes and a tangled mop of red curly hair. When they were kids, Kevin McCarty would never fight back when Rory O'Bannon attacked him. This was not because Kevin was frail and undersized and often sickly. He had courage enough. But he could not stand violence and it was impossible for him to strike a blow that might hurt a living thing. That is why he had sought the peace and spiritual life that the brotherhood offered.

The crooked bone in Kevin's thin nose was the result of a beating Rory O'Bannon had given him for no reason at all one day when he was walking home from St. Ignatius' Parochial School.

Sometimes, when the weather changed, Kevin's left arm pained him. Long ago Rory O'Bannon had twisted the arm behind his back and when Kevin had refused to say his mother was a word that the bully tried to make him say, the arm had snapped.

Kevin McCarty was not so far removed from the world outside the stone walls of the seminary that he did not read the newspapers and occasionally listen to the radio. He knew what Rory O'Bannon had become. The police had arrested Rory many times and crime commissions had questioned him as often, but only once had he been sent to gaol. That time they had found a deadly weapon on his person.

They said that Rory O'Bannon was a right bower of Martello, who headed the Syndicate, and that he dealt in such unsavoury commodities as narcotics and prostitution. But when they questioned him, Rory stood on his constitutional rights and refused to answer, or stated he was a good citizen because he paid his taxes, and all they had against him, really, was that he owned a night club of questionable repute.

The undressing in blue light and the entertaining of Rory's customers after hours were not the worst things Rose Kathleen told of in her letter. She had lived with Rory O'Bannon for a while, it seemed, in the way that only a wife should live with a man. When Rory had grown tired of her, she had taken to the drugs her mobster peddled.

Soon she was not even fit to earn her living as a " dancer." She had to have the stuff, she said, so she sold the only thing she had to sell to get it. Finally she could stand the life she led no longer and had drunk the poison, and thus had added another sin to her poor young soul that had so many scars already.

In the package that came with the letter Kevin found a diary written in his little sister's childish scrawl. She had kept it while she lived with Rory O'Bannon and she had listed names and dates and places concerning the sale of narcotics and other illegal

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transactions. The name of Martello appeared in the diary many times. Rose Kathleen had thought the information in the little book might enable Kevin to see that Rory O'Bannon and his dynasty of corruption were destroyed.

After Rose Kathleen's funeral, Kevin McCarty appeared before Father Francis, the seminary's rector, and told him of the contents of the letter and the diary. Father Francis had known Kevin's family and the neighbourhood in which they lived for many years.

He said, "You must send the letter and the diary to Danny Meighan, my son. He grew up next door to you and he was your boyhood friend. I think he loved your little sister, too. Danny is a detective now, you know."

Kevin McCarty shook his head. "I will see Danny, Father. That much I intend. But Danny cannot make Rory O'Bannon die for his sins, and die he must. It is I who must see that Rory O'Bannon dies. It is that I have come to tell you, Father. I must renounce my vows and go back into the world."

The old priest gazed unbelievingly at the frail young man whose pale skin never seemed to brown under the sun of the gardens. "Your vows . . ." the old priest said.

"The Jesuit vows of obedience and poverty," Kevin McCarty replied. "I am poor enough in both wealth and resource, Father. And I am obedient in a way you can never understand. I am obedient to the thing within me that says Rory O'Bannon must die."

"The devil's counsel," Father Francis said.

"I freely confess it is the devil and not Our Blessed Saviour that has possessed me," Kevin McCarty answered. "But to see that Rory O'Bannon dies is my mission and I cannot shirk it. I do not wish to blaspheme, Father, but I say that some men are too vile and evil for the Lord in His kindness and forgiveness to contend with. The devil is the only match for the likes of Rory O'Bannon."

"My son," said Father Francis, "your shock and grief are great and your mind is unhinged. Do you realise that you are telling me, in effect, that you plan to murder Rory O'Bannon?"

"Rory O'Bannon must die," Kevin McCarty repeated stubbornly.

The old priest shook his head and smiled. "No, my son," he said. "I do not fear for you. You are the gentlest of all the brothers. You are one of the gentlest men who has walked the earth since Our Saviour died upon the Cross. I have no fear for you, I say. This mood will pass. You could not kill. You could not inflict hurt upon any living thing. Go, if you must,

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but I will make no report to the Father Provincial as yet. I have abiding faith you will return."

" I am going out into the world again, Father," Kevin McCarty said. " Rory O'Bannon must die, and I am the one who must see to it."

Kevin McCarty left the seminary wearing wrinkled, outmoded clothes and carrying as luggage only the letter and the diary.

His most urgent problem was to find a temporary means of earning his food and lodging while he set about his more important business. He was almost completely naïve, so the problem did not worry him at all.

When he was a boy he had delivered groceries for his father's friends, the Gilberto brothers, and later he had been a clerk in their delicatessen store on Bleecker Street. He would simply go to the Gilbertos and ask for his old job back again. He needed very little in the way of money.

He found the old store the same as it had always been, long and narrow and darkish and redolent of ageing cheese and spicy peppers. The Gilbertos—Jacomo, Harry, and Charley—were the same, too, only older. They were garrulous, kindly, devoted to their business.

The deer head was still hanging there upon the wall. All the Gilbertos were hunters. Kevin's father had sometimes accompanied them on hunting trips to upstate New York and New Jersey and as far away as Canada.

The oldest brother, Jacomo, had shot the deer whose head hung on the wall. It was dusty and mangy-looking now and one of the antlers had been broken somehow. The deer's head with the accusing glass eyes had always sickened Kevin McCarty.

The three Gilberto brothers greeted Kevin effusively. At first they could not believe he had given up the religious life or that he really wanted his old job back. When they were convinced, they gave him a job as assistant readily enough, apologising for the salary they could afford to pay. " We are growing old, the three of us," said Charley. " The hours are long. We can use a little help."

Kevin found a furnished one-room flat almost directly across the street from the store. The room was on the second floor, in the front of the house, and he could sit by the window and watch the trucks and cars and pushcarts and the milling Irish and Italians on the street. In the distance he could see the old church where he had made his first communion.

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It took him a week or so to orient himself and to formulate his plan for the killing of Rory O'Bannon.

The Gilberto brothers agreed that Kevin should open the store each morning at eight and they gave him a key. At ten, Jacomo came in to help, then later Harry arrived, and finally Charley, who kept the store open until ten at night. Kevin left at five as a rule, but if there was a rush he often stayed on until well past dinner-time. He ate at hash counters in the neighbourhood and was never entirely conscious of what food he had ordered. Sometimes he forgot to eat at all and would be surprised when he awakened in the middle of the night with hunger pangs in his stomach.

He rang the Mercer Street Station and found that Detective Danny Meighan was working the four to midnight shift that week. One evening he dropped in to see his friend. Danny took him to a little private office off the detective squad room where they could be alone.

They exchanged reminiscences of their boyhood in the Greenwich Village streets and in the paved playground behind St. Ignatius' School. Finally they spoke of Rose Kathleen, whom Danny Meighan had loved when he was very young, and, inevitably, of Rory O'Bannon.

"I knew she had taken up with him while you were away with the fathers," Danny said. "I tried to stop her in my blundering, stupid way, but it did no good, no good at all.

"I thought of writing to you, but I doubted it would help and I was afraid it would only worry you, spoil the quiet and holy life you led. When young girls get like that there's no accounting for it. It's a certain kind of craziness, I guess. I see a lot just like her in my job. The worse the man is, the tighter hold he seems to get over young girls like Rose Kathleen."

Kevin McCarty said, "Suppose, just suppose now, Danny, that a young girl who went with a man like Rory O'Bannon kept a diary. Suppose she named names and listed places where drugs were sold and unlawful things were done. If the police had such a document, could they take action?"

Danny Meighan's eyes narrowed. "Are you trying to tell me, Kevin boy, that your sister left such a diary?"

"Now, now, Danny," Kevin McCarty answered. "It's a game of just-suppose, like we used to play when we were kids. You were brought up by the Jesuits yourself. You should know their propensity for arguing and speculating upon abstract propositions."

"Abstract, is it?" asked the young detective. "Well, Kevin boy, if you've got evidence of the sort that's concrete and not

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abstract, you'd best give it to the police without further argument or speculation about abstractions."

Kevin shook his head. "The man of action," he said. "Tell me, now. If I gave you such a little book, what would happen, Danny?"

"The police would investigate all the persons named and raid all the addresses mentioned. Given sufficient grounds, they would make arrests."

"And what would happen to the men after they were arrested?"

"They would go to trial, of course. The diary you mention might prove valuable as substantiating evidence."

"What would be their punishment?"

Danny Meighan chuckled. "None of your Jesuit tricks," he warned. "If they were guilty and the police case was presented properly, the jury would convict and the judge would sentence them."

"What would be the sentence?" the frail man persisted.

The detective shrugged. "Who knows? Ten years, perhaps. More likely five."

Kevin McCarty said, "It's not enough. Rory O'Bannon is our own age, about. He'd still be young enough when he got out of prison to ruin more young girls, to sell more narcotics to school kids. A man like Rory O'Bannon should be condemned to die."

Danny Meighan was startled. "You say that?" he asked. "A gentle soul like you who would never hurt a fly? But you're right, of course, and I agree entirely. There have been several bills drawn up to make the sale of narcotics a capital crime carrying the death penalty, but none of them has been passed."

Kevin McCarty rose. "It's been good to see you," he said. "I'm sorry to have taken up your time with suppositional matters. But Rory O'Bannon must die. I'm determined that he must."

The detective looked even more amazed.

"Wait, now, my gentle friend," he said. "Are you telling me that you'll take the law in your own two hands and go gunning for O'Bannon your own self? I must warn you, then, that the killing of even a louse-bit rat like Rory would be murder under the law."

Kevin McCarty nodded. His face was very serious. "I know," he answered. "If I stumble across something less—abstract—I may call upon you again, Danny."

"Do that," said Danny Meighan. "And be careful, Kevin

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lad. The likes of Rory O'Bannon are a bit too tough for Jesuit brothers who grow flowers and ponder on abstractions."

Kevin McCarty was no detective but he had little trouble in finding Rory O'Bannon's address. During the crime investigations the papers had made much of Rory's fancy penthouse near the park.

For two nights after work Kevin watched the apartment entrance from a park bench, feeding crumbs to the pigeons from a bag he had brought along, but he failed to see anyone who resembled Rory in the slightest.

On the third night he left the store earlier and took up his post before he ate his dinner. His vigil was rewarded.

A bulky man with a brash face and unruly red hair fringing the brim of his homburg swaggered out of the glass-and-chromium entrance of the apartment building, flanked on each side by blank-faced men whose shoulders were ridiculously padded and whose hats appeared a size too large. The three entered a waiting limousine as black and shiny as a hearse.

Kevin had not seen Rory since the young bully had gone away to reform school, but he had no trouble recognising him. The papers had been filled with O'Bannon's pictures. Rory had grown much taller and his middle had widened to a paunch, but the wild, cruel look on his face was just the same as always.

For a solid week of nights Kevin watched and fed the pigeons. Each night Rory and the blank-faced men and the big car that looked like a hearse appeared. Rory's routine seemed as well established as any respectable citizen's. His schedule varied only by minutes from night to night.

Kevin McCarty felt no qualms about ending his evening watch. The pigeons were plump to the point of exploding, for many others fed them, too. Kevin McCarty knew where to find Rory O'Bannon when he wanted him . . .

On the second Sabbath after his return to the world of noise and haste and evil men, Kevin took a bus to the quiet village on the Hudson where the seminary was situated. Priests are ordinary men, and like ordinary men, they have their hobbies. Father Francis' hobby was photography.

He had a camera with a variety of lenses and filters and he had fitted out a large cupboard as a darkroom. He had filled albums with his photographs of the fathers and the seminarians and the brothers at their work and studies and devotions. He had taken a great fancy to the gentle brother, Kevin McCarty, and had taught him the elements of such matters as shutter-speeds and f-stops.

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Father Francis was overjoyed on that sunny Sabbath afternoon when Kevin McCarty walked into his study that was filled with bright plaster saints who brooded on dark rows of books. He thought a prodigal brother had returned and although he doubted his ability to find a fatted calf at such short notice, he was fully prepared to open the best tinned delicacies in the seminary kitchen in celebration.

When he found that Kevin had not returned to the fold for good, but only came to borrow his camera and use his darkroom, Father Francis' lined face fell.

" And what of your crazy fixation about this O'Bannon? " he asked.

" I've seen him several times but only from a distance," Kevin replied evasively.

The mystified old man granted Kevin permission to use his photographic equipment, although he felt a strange premonition that the camera and developers might be used for Satan's work.

Kevin had brought the diary along with him. He photographed several pages that he had marked in advance. He developed the negatives and hung the prints up on a rack to dry before Father Francis' small electric fan.

While he was waiting for the prints to dry he had a glass of wine with the old man and told him of the Gilberto brothers and their kindness and of Danny Meighan. He avoided mentioning the prints he had made or his dead sister or Rory O'Bannon. Later, when the prints were dry, he put them in an envelope, pocketed the envelope, and bade the old priest farewell.

Father Francis pressed Kevin's arm. " My son," he said, " leave God's work to God. I have made no report of you to the Father Provincial as yet."

" Rory O'Bannon is not God's work, Father," Kevin McCarty answered.

For the next two days, Kevin McCarty did little but tend the counter of the store and eat food when he was hungry and sit by the window in his room and compose a letter in his head. When the letter was finally composed to his satisfaction, he put the words upon a piece of paper.

Dear Rory,

You may remember me from our youth or because of my late sister, Rose Kathleen, God rest her soul. I am writing you because Rose Kathleen kept a diary which is now in my possession. I enclose photostats of certain pages from the little book. You will note that your name and the name of Mr. Martello and others are mentioned frequently.

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I have not decided just what should be done with this little book. I suppose it is my duty to give it to the authorities. But before I do so I would like to talk to you. If you wish to discuss this matter before I go to the police you must follow my instructions to the letter.

You will come to the room on the second-floor front of the house at the address I write below at exactly three-fifteen next Sunday afternoon. You will come alone. I can watch the street from my window and if there are others with you, they will not be admitted to the house. Nor will you be admitted at any time except three-fifteen exactly on Sunday afternoon.

You may fear a trap, of course. I tell you that you will find me quite alone and you may remember that I am neither large nor strong. I don't believe that I need warn you to come unarmed. If you fear a trap it would be foolish to supply the police with evidence against you, wouldn't it?

If you do not arrive at three-fifteen exactly next Sunday afternoon, I will go directly to the police and the diary will be in their hands by three-thirty. If this occurs, you and Mr. Martello and the others will doubtless be arrested and I will make a point of seeing that Mr. Martello knows you could have prevented his arrest by merely talking to me.

Kevin McCarty

Kevin posted the letter and the enclosures. He stopped at a small shop in Bleecker Street and had duplicates made of the keys to his front door and his room. Then he walked to Mercer Street and mounted the stairs to the detective squad room.

When he and Danny were closeted in the little office again, Kevin said, " Danny, my boy, I've progressed from the abstract to the concrete. If you do exactly as I say you may be able to arrest Rory O'Bannon, with ample evidence of his guilt, next Sunday afternoon."

He handed the duplicate keys to the detective. " At three-thirty next Sunday afternoon come to this address." He wrote the address of his house upon a slip of paper and handed it to Danny Meighan.

" Use the thick key to open the front door. Walk up one flight of stairs. Then left to the room at the front. Open that door with the thin key. That's all you have to do. But if you value your badge and maybe promotion, be there at three-thirty on the dot, not a minute early or a minute late."

Danny Meighan protested loudly. He demanded to know what Kevin McCarty was up to and he warned him that Rory O'Bannon was dangerous as a rattlesnake.

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Kevin silenced him. " You play my way," he said, " or I call the whole game off."

The gentle brother's next problem was obtaining a gun. He had little knowledge of such matters, but he thought you had to have some kind of permit to purchase firearms. He could think of no good reason he might give the authorities for wanting a licence for a gun. The simplest thing was to use one of the rifles the Gilbertos kept racked in a storage cupboard in the back room of the delicatessen.

Acquiring the rifle posed a moral problem. Kevin McCarty had no difficulty at all, in his simple way, in determining right from wrong. But determining between two sins was a different matter. In the end, he decided that lying might be less grievous than stealing. One morning, before the other Gilbertos arrived at the store, Kevin approached Jacomo, the eldest of the brothers. He believed Jacomo would prove the most credulous of the three.

" Mr. Jacomo," he said, and he realised how false his voice must sound, " a friend has asked me to go shooting in the woods next Sunday. I wonder if you would lend me one of your fine guns."

Jacomo was not so credulous. He glared at Kevin and twirled his fierce moustaches. " You! Go shooting! Why, I remember when your father wanted to teach you to shoot when you were a boy. I think it's bigger game than squirrels and rabbits you want my rifle for, and I refuse." The old man twirled his moustache indignantly. " Besides," he added, " you have no licence."

Later in the day Jacomo took his assistant aside. " I did not mean to be so rude," he said. " Take my advice, for I am old and I knew your father, rest his soul. You are not a man who's made for violence. Leave punishment to God and the police."

So the Gilbertos had known about his sister and Rory O'Bannon, too. Everyone had known, it seemed—everyone but Kevin McCarty. He had been too busy with the flowers at the seminary . . .

In the end he was forced to commit two sins. He had already lied. Now he must steal.

On Friday of that week, two days after he had posted the letter, Kevin glanced out of the window of the store and saw two men eyeing the house where he lived. The shoulders of the men's suits were padded ridiculously and their hats were a size too large. The limousine that was as big and black as a hearse was not in sight, nor was Rory O'Bannon.

The two blank-faced men walked down the street to a corner tavern. Presently they returned and entered the Gilbertos'

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delicatessen. They must have talked to the barman who had grown up with Kevin. They walked straight up to him. Kevin was making a " hero " sandwich—a whole small loaf of Italian bread sliced down the middle and stuffed with spiced meat and cheese—for a workman.

When the two men saw how small and meek Kevin was, they exchanged glances and almost burst out laughing. Kevin finished the sandwich and looked inquiringly at the two blank-faced men as if he had never seen them before.

" Gimme one of them," the first man said, pointing to the bulky sandwich.

" Make it two," said the second man.

Kevin made the sandwiches, then said, " Mustard? "

" Yeah, mustard," said one blank-faced man.

" That's right," said the other.

" Bottla pop," said one.

" Make it two," said the other.

None of the Gilbertos was near. Kevin opened pop bottles on the counter. One blank-faced man pulled out a clasp knife, snapped it open, held Kevin with his eyes. He halved the sandwich with his knife, saying, " Your name McCarty? "

" It is that," Kevin answered.

The blank-faced man said, " You're gonna have a visitor Sunday. At three-fifteen. Be nice to him. Give him what he wants. We'll be right outside."

The blank-faced man laid the knife on the counter with the blade unsheathed. The two men with padded shoulders ate their sandwiches and drank their pop. They stared at Kevin as they ate and drank. They finished and put a bill on the counter. One man clasped and pocketed the knife. He pushed a half-dollar tip towards Kevin.

" Be nice," he said again.

The two men with the padded shoulders and the hats a size too large left without looking back.

Kevin McCarty did not see Rory's bodyguards again that day or on Saturday.

The day that Kevin had dedicated to what he called the devil's work was a Sabbath shining with God's bright sun. Bleecker Street was festive with small Italian girls in starched and frilly dresses who clutched bouquets of white and pink rosebuds. They were starry-eyed after their first communion.

At noon Kevin crossed the street to the delicatessen store and opened the big door with his key. He nodded to several loungers in the street. The loungers knew he worked at the store—they

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would think nothing of his entering at a time the delicatessen was supposed to be closed.

Kevin went at once to the back room and turned on a dim bulb. He secured a screwdriver from the Gilbertos' tool chest. The door to the cupboard where the guns were kept was fastened by a padlock that fitted two rings screwed into the wall and door. In five minutes Kevin had removed one of the rings and the door creaked open.

Kevin McCarty had never pulled a trigger but he knew something about firearms. His father, hoping to interest his son in shooting, had made Kevin clean his rifles. Kevin liked the weight and balance of a Marlin rifle. He removed it from the rack and loaded it with the proper ammunition.

He did not feel too guilty about taking the rifle. It would be returned when the thing was done. He could not return the ammunition, of course. Once a bullet is fired it is of no further use. He had taken only one bullet, because that was all he would need.

Kevin took his sister's diary from his pocket and placed it in the space the Marlin had occupied. It was a safe enough hiding-place.

He tore a long piece of wide, brown butcher's paper from a roll in the store. He wrapped the rifle into a shapeless package and wound heavy string round it. He screwed back the ring, to which the padlock was still attached, into the wall and returned to his room with the shapeless package tucked under his arm.

Kevin unwrapped the rifle, then stuffed the paper and string into a tin wastebasket that had Easter lilies painted on it. He leaned the loaded rifle against the window, behind the curtains. He took a Bible from the table and sat down in the chair by the window. It was just twelve-thirty.

At ten minutes past three, Kevin glanced at the loud-ticking alarm clock on the table. He placed the Bible in his lap, shifted slightly in his chair, and gazed out of the window. He saw a limousine as big and black as a hearse approaching. The car passed under Kevin's window very slowly. He could see a blurred face pressed against the window of the car.

The car moved on to the corner and was steered into a parking space. Three men got out. One was Rory O'Bannon. The other two wore suits with padded shoulders and hats a size too large.

Kevin smiled. Rory was afraid to come alone. "We'll be right outside," one of the men had said.

Now the two men seemed to be arguing with Rory. At length

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one returned to the car. The other walked briskly down the street and took up a post outside the Gilbertos' delicatessen.

Rory O'Bannon crossed to Kevin's side of the street. When he reached the house, he examined the number on the door. The bell buzzed in Kevin's room.

It was exactly three-fifteen. Kevin placed the Bible on the table, then pressed the plunger that released the front door latch. He glanced out of the window to make sure that only Rory entered. He opened the door of his room slightly and left it ajar. He returned to the chair by the window. He could feel the rifle through the curtains. The stairs groaned under Rory's weight.

Then there was a soft tapping on the door.

" Come in, Rory. I'm quite alone."

Rory O'Bannon's big frame filled the doorway. The wild eyes darted suspiciously about the little room. The big man crossed to Kevin's chair in three strides. He grabbed Kevin under the arms and pulled him up roughly.

Without saying a word, he tapped Kevin's pockets and armpits. He shoved Kevin back into the chair, jerked open the door of the cupboard, and peered inside. He even looked under the bed. At last he was satisfied.

He looked speculatively at Kevin McCarty, gave a short unpleasant laugh, seated himself on the edge of a chair, and said, " You got the diary? What's the deal? "

" I haven't got the diary here," Kevin answered. " It's hidden in a place known only to myself. There's a way you can prevent me taking it to the police. Let's understand each other, Rory. You once tried beating me to make me say a thing I didn't want to say. That didn't work. I know your men are downstairs. You can't kidnap me, though—Bleecker is a crowded street. You could never get away with dragging me to that big car of yours."

" How much you want? " asked Rory. " Wait. I got something to tell you first. It ain't worth much. It ain't worth much because your little sister was a hophead and a tramp. A judge or jury won't believe much of what a hophead and a tramp writes down. But it might cause a little trouble. Martello don't like trouble. He'll pay a little just to save him trouble."

Kevin McCarty stole a glance at the clock. Three-twenty-three. Seven minutes more. Maybe he had timed it wrong. Maybe he should have allowed only ten minutes instead of fifteen. He pretended to think over the sum he should ask. The clock ticked loudly but all too slowly.

Finally, he said, " I don't want money, Rory. I took the

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Jesuit vow of poverty once. I only want to prove a theory. The Jesuits are great ones for proving theories, Rory."

The clock ticked. Three-twenty-five. Five minutes more.

"Quit the doubletalk," said Rory angrily. "Whatcha trying to prove?"

"I've always had a theory you were yellow, Rory. I want to prove it."

Rory O'Bannon's face went crimson. He rose from his chair, advanced a step towards the frail, calm man. Kevin McCarty hadn't risen from the chair. But a rifle had suddenly appeared in his hands. The rifle was pointed directly at Rory O'Bannon.

Three-twenty-six.

"Don't come any closer, Rory," Kevin McCarty warned. "The rifle's loaded. Sit down in the chair."

Rory sat. "You doublecrossing rat," he said.

Kevin McCarty said, "No, Rory. You'll get your chance, just as I promised. I think you're yellow. I don't think you have the guts to kill a man. I want to prove you haven't."

Three-twenty-seven.

Kevin McCarty glanced out of the window. The big black car was still parked down the street. The blank-faced man was standing intent, motionless, across the street. Then Kevin saw Danny Meighan approaching. He was walking at a pace that was maddeningly slow.

"In just a minute I'm going to walk out of that door, Rory," Kevin McCarty said. "I'm going to get the diary and go straight to the police. There's only one way you can stop me. You can kill me."

"O.K.," said Rory. "Listen, I'll pay, see? I'll pay plenty. You can give it to the church."

Danny Meighan was in front of the house now. He was consulting a slip of paper to confirm the address. He was mounting the verandah.

Kevin McCarty rose. He crossed the room. He stood by the door. Below, he heard steps mounting the stairs. He tossed the rifle into Rory O'Bannon's lap. He said, "It's on safety. Snap back that little knob on the right to take it off. I'm leaving, Rory. This is your last chance."

He touched the doorknob. "Shoot me now, Rory, or I go to the cops. Be sure you kill me—or I'll talk and tell them where to find the diary."

Rory raised the rifle, complete amazement on his face.

A man, walking cautiously, was coming down the hall.

"Good-bye, Rory O'Bannon," said Kevin McCarty, turning the knob.

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The small room was filled with sudden sound.
Kevin McCarty crumpled to the floor.

The gentlest of the brothers lived for just sixty tickings of the clock. But he lived long enough.

He lived long enough to hear the door fly open and to see Danny Meighan standing there with a revolver in his hand. He lived long enough to hear the futile trigger-click of the now empty rifle, to hear the rifle drop to the floor, and to hear Rory's squeal, " Don't shoot! Don't shoot me, copper! "

He lived just long enough to know that Rory O'Bannon would surely die in the electric chair for the murder of Kevin McCarty.

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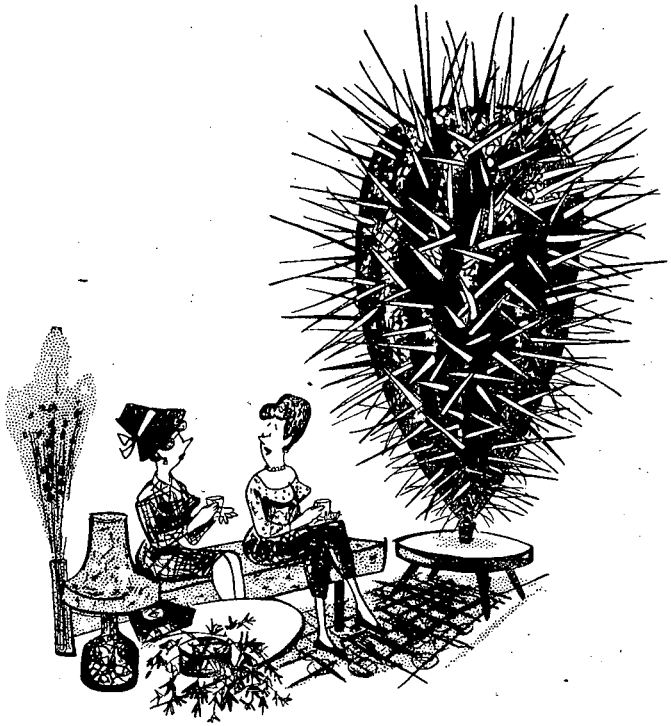

" It needs repotting, but somehow I keep putting it off."

Drawing by Mahood
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The Illustrated WOMAN

By RAY BRADBURY

WHEN a new patient wanders into the room and stretches out to stutter forth a compendious ticker-tape of free-association, it is up to the psychiatrist immediately beyond, behind, and above, to decide at just which points of the anatomy the client is in touch with the couch.

In other words, where does the patient make contact with reality?

Some people seem to float half an inch above any surface whatsoever. They have not seen earth in so long they have become somewhat airsick.

Still others so firmly weight themselves down, clutch, thrust, heave their bodies towards reality that long after they are gone you find their tiger shapes and claw marks in the upholstery.

In the case of Emma Fleet, Dr. William C. George was a long time deciding which was furniture and which was woman and where what touched which.

For, to begin with, Emma Fleet resembled a couch.

"Mrs. Emma Fleet, Doctor," announced his receptionist.

Dr. William C. George gasped.

And it *was* a traumatic experience, seeing this woman shunt herself through the door without benefit of railway signalman or the ground-crews who rush about under barrage balloons, heaving on lines, guiding the massive images to some hangar off beyond.

In came Emma Fleet, as quick as her name, the floor shifting like a huge scale under her weight.

He must have gasped again, guessing her at twenty-eight stone on the hoof, for Emma Fleet smiled as if reading his mind.

"Twenty-eight stone and half a pound, to be exact," she said.

He found himself staring at his furniture.

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" Oh, it'll hold all right," said Mrs. Fleet intuitively.

She sat down. The couch yelped like a cur.

Dr. George cleared his throat. " Before you make yourself comfortable," he said, " I feel I should say, immediately and honestly, that we in the psychiatric field have had little success in inhibiting appetites. The whole problem of weight and food has so far eluded our ability for coping. A strange admission, perhaps, but unless we put our frailties forth, we might be in danger of fooling ourselves and thus taking money under false pretences. So, if you are here seeking help for your figure, I must list myself among the nonplussed."

" Thank you for your honesty, Doctor," said Emma Fleet. " However, I don't wish to lose. I'd prefer your helping me *gain* another eight or ten stone."

" Oh no! " Dr. George exclaimed.

" Oh yes. But my heart will not allow what my deep dear soul would most gladly endure. My physical heart might fail at what my loving heart and mind would ask of it."

She sighed. The couch sighed.

" Let me brief you. I'm married to Willy Fleet. We work for the Dillbeck-Hornemann Travelling Shows. I'm known as Lady Bountiful. And, Willy . . .? "

She swooned up out of the couch and glided or rather escorted her shadow across the floor. She opened the door.

Beyond, in the waiting-room, a cane in one hand, a straw hat in the other, seated rigidly, staring at the wall, was a tiny man with tiny feet and tiny hands and tiny bright blue eyes in a tiny head. He was, at the most, one would guess, three feet high, and probably weighed four stone in the rain. But there was a proud, gloomy, almost violent look of genius blazing in that small but craggy face.

" That's Willy Fleet," said Emma lovingly, and shut the door.

The couch, sat on, cried again.

Emma beamed at the psychiatrist who was still staring, in shock, at the door.

" No children, of course? " he heard himself say.

" No children." Her smile lingered. " But that's not my problem, either. Willy, in a way, is my child. And I, in a way, besides being his wife, am his mother. It all has to do with size, I imagine, and we're happy with the way we've balanced things up."

" Well, if your problem isn't children, or your size, or his, or controlling weight, then what . . .? "

Emma Fleet laughed lightly, tolerantly. It was a nice laugh, like a girl's somehow caught in that great body and throat.

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" Patience, Doctor. Mustn't we go back down the road to where Willy and I first met? "

The doctor shrugged, laughed quietly himself, and relaxed, nodding. " You must."

" At school," said Emma Fleet, " I weighed thirteen stone, and tipped the scales at eighteen when I was twenty-one. Needless to say, I went on few summer excursions. Most of the time I was left in dry dock. I had many girl friends, however, who liked to be seen with me. They weighed eleven stone, most of them, and I made them feel svelte. But . . . that's a long time ago. I don't worry over it any more. Willy changed all that."

" Willy sounds a remarkable man," Dr. George found himself saying, against all the rules.

" Oh, he is, he is! He—smoulders—with ability, with talent as yet undiscovered, untapped! " she said, quickening warmly. " God bless him, he leapt into my life like summer lightning!

" Eight years ago I went with my girl friends to the visiting Labour Day carnival. By the end of the evening the girls had all been seized away from me by the running boys who, rushing by, grabbed and took them off into the night. There I was alone with three kewpie dolls, a fake alligator handbag, and nothing to do but make the Guess Your Weight man nervous by looking at him every time I went by and pretending at any moment I might pay my money and dare him to guess.

" But the Guess Your Weight man *wasn't* nervous! After I had passed three times I saw him staring at me. With awe, yes, with admiration! And who was this Guess Your Weight man? Willy Fleet, of course.

" The fourth time I passed he called to me and said I could get a prize free if only I'd let him guess my weight. He was all feverish and excited. He danced around. I'd never been made so much of in my life. I blushed. I felt good.

" So I sat in the scales chair. I heard the pointer whizz round and I heard Willy whistle with honest delight.

" ' Twenty stone and nine pounds! ' he cried. ' Oh boy, oh boy, you're *lovely!* '

" ' I'm *what?* ' I said.

" ' You're the loveliest woman in the whole world,' said Willy, looking me right in the eye.

" I blushed again. I laughed. We both laughed. Then I must have cried, for the next thing, sitting there, I felt him touch my elbow with concern. He was gazing into my face, faintly alarmed.

" ' I haven't said the wrong thing—? ' he asked.

" ' No,' I sobbed, and then grew quiet. " The right thing. It's the first time anyone ever—'

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" ' What? ' he said.

" ' Ever put up with my fat,' I said.

" ' You're not fat,' he said. ' You're large, you're big, you're wonderful. Michelangelo would have loved you. Titian would have loved you. Da Vinci would have loved you. They knew what they were doing in those days. Size. Size is everything.

" ' I should know. Look at me. I travelled with Singer's Midgets for six seasons, known as Jack Thimble. And, oh dear lady, you're right out of the most glorious part of the Renaissance. Bernini, who built those colonnades round the front of St. Peter's and inside at the altar, would have sold his everlasting soul just to know someone like you.'

" ' Don't! ' I cried. ' I wasn't meant to feel this happy. It'll hurt so much when you stop.'

" ' I won't stop, then,' he said. ' Miss . . . ? '

" ' Emma Gertz.'

" ' Emma,' he said, ' are you married? '

" ' Are you kidding? ' I said.

" ' Emma, do you like to travel? '

" ' I've never travelled.'

" ' Emma,' he said, ' this old carnival's going to be in your town one more week. Come down every night, every day, why not? Talk to me, know me. At the end of the week, who can tell, maybe you'll travel with me.'

" ' What are you suggesting? ' I said, not really angry or irritated or anything, but fascinated and intrigued that anyone would offer anything to Moby Dick's daughter.

" ' I mean marriage! ' Willy Fleet looked at me, breathing hard, and I had the feeling that he was dressed in a mountaineer's rig, alpine hat, climbing boots, spikes, and a rope slung over his baby shoulder. And if I should ask him, ' Why are you saying this? ' he might well answer, ' Because you're *there*.'

" But I didn't ask, so he didn't answer. We stood there in the night, at the centre of the carnival, until at last I started off down the fairway, swaying. ' I'm drunk! ' I cried. ' Oh, so very drunk, and I've had nothing to drink.'

" ' Now that I've found you! ' called Willy Fleet after me, ' you'll never escape me, remember! '

" Stunned and reeling, blinded by his large man's words sung out in his soprano voice, I somehow blundered away from the carnival grounds and trekked home.

" The next week, we were married."

Emma Fleet paused and looked at her hands. " Would it bother you if I told about the honeymoon? " she asked shyly.

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"No," said the doctor, then lowered his voice, for he was responding all too quickly to the details. "Please do go on."

"The honeymoon." Emma sounded her vox humana. The response from all the chambers of her body vibrated the couch, the room, the doctor, the dear bones within the doctor.

"The honeymoon . . . was not usual."

The doctor's eyebrows lifted the faintest touch. He looked from the woman to the door beyond which, in miniature, sat the image of a mountaineer, and of Everest.

"You have never seen such a rush. Willy spirited me off to his home, a lovely doll's house, really, with one large normal-sized room that was to be mine, or rather, ours. There, very politely, always the kind, the thoughtful, the quiet gentleman, he asked for my blouse, which I gave him, my skirt, which I gave him. Right down the list, I handed him the garments that he named, until at last . . . Can one blush from head to foot? One can. One did. I stood like a veritable hearth-fire stoked by a blush of all-encompassing and ever-moving colour that surged and resurged up and down my body in tints of pink and rose and then pink again.

"'You're the loveliest grand camellia that ever did unfurl!' cried Willy. Whereupon new tides of blush moved in hidden avalanches within, showing only to colour the tent of my body, the outermost and, to Willy anyway, most precious skin.

"What did Willy do then? Guess."

"I daren't," said the doctor, flustered himself.

"He walked round and round me."

"*Circled* you?"

"Round and round, like a sculptor gazing at a huge block of snow-white granite. He said so, himself. Granite or marble from which he might shape images of beauty as yet unguessed. Round and round he walked, sighing and shaking his head happily at his fortune, his little hands clasped, his little eyes bright. Where to begin, he seemed to be thinking, where, where to begin?

"He spoke at last. 'Emma,' he asked, 'why, why do you think I've worked for years as the Guess Your Weight man at the carnival? Why? Because I have been searching my lifetime through for such as you. Night after night, summer after summer, I've watched those scales jump and twitter! And now at last I've the means, the way, the wall, the canvas, whereby to express my genius!'

"He stopped walking and looked at me, his eyes brimming over. 'Emma,' he said softly, 'may I have permission to do anything absolutely whatsoever at all with you?'

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" ' Oh, Willy, Willy,' I cried. ' Anything! ' "

Emma Fleet paused.

The doctor found himself at the edge of his chair.

" Yes, yes. And then? "

" And then," said Emma Fleet, " he brought out all his boxes and bottles of inks and stencils and his bright silver tattoo needles."

" Tattoo needles? "

The doctor fell back in his chair.

" He . . . tattooed you? "

" He tattooed me."

" He was a tattoo artist? "

" He was, he is, an artist. Only the form his art takes happens to be the tattoo."

" And you," said the doctor slowly, " were the canvas for which he had been searching much of his adult life? "

" I was the canvas for which he had searched *all* of his adult life." She let it sink, and it *did* sink, and kept on sinking, in to the doctor. Then when she saw it had struck bottom and stirred up vast quantities of mud, she went serenely on.

" So our grand life began! I loved Willy and Willy loved me and we both loved this thing that was larger than ourselves that we were doing together. Nothing less than creating the greatest picture the world has ever seen!

" ' Nothing less than perfection! ' cried Willy.

" ' Nothing less than perfection! ' cried myself, in response.

" Oh, it was a happy time. Ten thousand cosy busy hours we spent together. You can't imagine how proud it made me to be the vast shore along which the genius of Willy Fleet ebbed and flowed in a tide of colours.

" One year alone we spent on my right arm and my left, half a year on my right leg, eight months on my left, in preparation for the grand explosion of bright detail which erupted out along my collarbones and shoulderblades, which fountained upwards from my hips to meet in a glorious July celebration of pinwheels, Titian nudes, Giorgione landscapes, and El Greco cross-indexes of lightning on my façade, prickling with vast electric fires up and down my spine.

" Dear me, there never has been, there never will be, a love like ours again, a love where two people so sincerely dedicated themselves to one task, of giving beauty to the world in equal portions. We flew to each other day after day, and if I ate more, grew larger, with the years, Willy approved, Willy applauded. Just that much more room, more space for his configurations to flower in.

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" We could not bear to be apart, for we both felt, were certain, that once the Masterpiece was finished we could leave circus, carnival, or vaudeville for ever. It was grandiose, yes, but we knew that, once finished, I could be toured through the Art Institute in Chicago, the Kress Collection in Washington, the Tate Gallery in London, the Louvre, the Uffizi . . . For the rest of our lives we would travel with the sun!

" So it went, year on year. We didn't need the world or the people of the world, we had each other. We worked at our ordinary jobs by day, and then till after midnight, there was Willy at my ankle, there was Willy at my elbow, there was Willy exploring up the incredible slope of my back towards the snowy-talcumed crest.

" Willy wouldn't let me see, most of the time. He didn't like me looking over his shoulder, he didn't like me looking over *my* shoulder for that matter. Months passed before, curious beyond madness, I would be allowed to see his progress, slow inch by inch, as the brilliant inks inundated me and I drowned in the rainbow of his inspirations. Eight years, eight glorious wondrous years. And then at last, it was done, it was finished. And Willy threw himself down and slept for forty-eight hours straight. And I slept near him, the mammoth bedded with the lamb.

" That was just four weeks ago. Four short weeks back, our happiness came to an end."

" Ah yes," said the doctor. " You and your husband are suffering from the creative equivalent of the baby blues, the depression a mother feels after her child is born. Your work is finished. A listless and somewhat sad period invariably follows. But now, consider, you will reap the rewards of your long labour, surely? You *will* tour the world? "

" No," cried Emma Fleet, and a tear sprang to her eye. " At any moment, Willy will run off and never return. He has begun to wander about the city. Yesterday I caught him brushing down the carnival scales. Today I found him working, for the first time in eight years, back at his Guess Your Weight booth! "

" Dear me," said the psychiatrist. " He's—? "

" Weighing new women, yes! Shopping for new canvas! He hasn't said, but I know, I know! This time he'll find a heavier woman yet, thirty-five, forty stones! I guessed this would happen, a month ago, when we finished the Masterpiece. So I ate still more, and stretched my skin still more, so that little places appeared here and there, little open stretches that Willy had to repair, to fill in with fresh detail.

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"But now I'm done, exhausted, I've stuffed to distraction, the last fill-in work is done. There's not a millionth of an inch of space left between my ankles and my Adam's apple where he can squeeze in one last demon, dervish, or baroque angel. I am, to Willy, work over and done. Now he wants to move on. He will marry, I fear, four more times in his life, each time to a larger woman, a greater extension for a greater mural, and the grand finale of his talent. Then, too, in the last week, he has become critical."

"Of the Masterpiece with a capital M?" asked the doctor.

"Like all artists, he is a perfectionist. Now he finds little flaws, a face here done slightly in the wrong tint or texture, a hand there twisted slightly askew by my hurried diet to gain more weight and thus give him new space and renew his attentions. To him, above all, I was a beginning. Now he must move on from his apprenticeship to his true masterworks.

"Oh, Doctor, I am about to be abandoned. Where is there for a woman who weighs twenty-eight stone and is laved with illustrations? If he leaves, what shall I do, where go, who would want me now? Will I be lost again in the world as I was lost before my wild happiness?"

"A psychiatrist," said the psychiatrist, "is not supposed to give advice. But—"

"But, but, but?" she cried eagerly.

"A psychiatrist is supposed to let the patient discover and cure himself. Yet, in this case—"

"This case, yes, go on!"

"It seems so simple. To keep your husband's love—"

"To keep his love, yes?"

The doctor smiled. "You must destroy the Masterpiece."

"What?"

"Erase it, get rid of it. Those tattoos *will* come off, won't they? I read somewhere once that—"

"Oh, Doctor!" Emma Fleet leapt up. "That's *it*! It can be done! And best of all, Willy can do it! It will take three months alone to wash me clean, rid me of the very Masterpiece that irks him now. Then, virgin-white again, we can start another eight years, after that another eight and another and another. Oh, Doctor, I know he'll do it! Perhaps he was only waiting for me to suggest—and I too stupid to guess! Oh, Doctor, Doctor!"

And she crushed him in her arms.

When the doctor broke happily free, she stood back, turning in a circle.

"How strange," she said. "In half an hour, you solve the

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next three thousand days and beyond, of my life. You're very wise. I'll pay you anything!"

"My usual modest fee is sufficient," said the doctor.

"I can hardly wait to tell Willy! But first," she said, "since you've been so wise, you deserve to see the Masterpiece before it is destroyed."

"That's hardly necessary, Mrs.—"

"You must discover for yourself the rare mind, eye, and artistic hand of Willy Fleet, before it is gone for ever, and we start anew!" she cried, unbuttoning her voluminous coat.

"It isn't really—"

"There!" she said, and flung her coat wide.

The doctor was somehow not surprised to see that she was stark naked beneath her coat.

He gasped. His eyes grew large. His mouth fell open. He sat down slowly, though in reality he somehow wished to stand, as he had in the fifth form as a boy, during the salute to the flag, following which three dozen voices broke into an awed and tremulous song:

Oh Beautiful for spacious skies,
O'er amber waves of grain.
They purple mountain majesties,
Above the fruited plain . . .

But, still seated, overwhelmed, he gazed at the continental vastness of the woman.

Upon which nothing whatsoever was stitched, painted, water-coloured, or in any way tattooed.

Naked, unadorned, untouched, unlined, unillustrated.

He gasped again.

Now she had whipped her coat back about her with a winsome acrobat's smile, as if she had just performed a towering feat. Now she was sailing towards the door.

"Wait—" said the doctor.

But she was out the door, in the reception-room, babbling, whispering, "Willy, Willy!" and bending to her husband, hissing in his tiny ear until *his* eyes flexed wide, and his firm and passionate mouth dropped open and he cried aloud and clapped his hands with elation.

"Doctor, Doctor, thank you, thank you!"

He darted forward and seized the doctor's hand and shook it hard. The doctor was surprised at the fire and rock hardness of that grip. It was the hand of a dedicated artist, as were the eyes burning up at him darkly from the wildly illuminated face.

"Everything's going to be fine!" cried Willy.

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The doctor hesitated, glancing from Willy to the great shadowing balloon that tugged at him wanting to fly off and away.

"We won't have to come back again, ever?"

Good lord, the doctor thought, does *he* think that *he* has illustrated her from stem to stern, and does she humour him about it? Is *he* mad?

Or does *she* imagine that he has tattooed her from neck to toebone, and does he humour her? Is *she* mad?

Or, most strange of all, do they *both* believe that he has swarmed, as across the Sistine Chapel ceiling, covering her with rare and significant beauties? Do both believe, know, humour each other in their specially-dimensioned world?

"Will we have to come back again?" asked Willy Fleet a second time.

"No." The doctor breathed a prayer. "I think not."

Why? Because, by some idiot grace, he had done the right thing, hadn't he? By prescribing for an invisible cause he had made a full cure, yes? Regardless if she believed or he believed or both believed in the Masterpiece, by suggesting the pictures be erased, destroyed, the doctor had made her a clean, lovely, and inviting canvas again, if *she* needed to be. And if he, on the other hand, wished a new woman to scribble, scrawl, and pretend to tattoo on, well, that worked, too. For new and untouched she would be.

"Thank you, Doctor, oh thank you, thank you!"

"Don't thank me," said the doctor. "I've done nothing."

He almost said that it was all a fluke, a joke, a surprise! I fell downstairs and landed on my feet!

"Good-bye, good-bye!"

And the lift slid down, the big woman and the little man sinking from sight into the now suddenly not-too-solid earth, where the atoms opened to let them pass.

"Good-bye, thanks . . . thanks . . ."

Their voices faded calling his name and praising his intellect long after they had passed the fourth floor.

The doctor looked around and moved unsteadily back into his room. He shut the door and leaned against it.

"Doctor," he murmured. "Heal thyself."

He stepped forward. He did not feel real. He must lie down, if but for a moment.

Where?

On the couch, of course, on the couch.

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VICTOR CANNING

CHICKEN BREAST PATTERN

THERE are few people, even in France, who know that there is such a thing as the Department of Patterns. It doesn't advertise itself and there is no sign outside the old house on the Quai d'Orsay where it occupies the top two floors; and

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when it solves a case the credit is always given to the police.

The department specialises in cases which it originates itself from its own research. Half a dozen young men sit sifting and working through masses of data, official records, press reports, and files, hoping that by arrangement and analysis some pattern of significance will emerge.

Take this chicken breast thing, for instance. Shortly after I was seconded to the department, I was given the job of checking and analysing the theft of lorries in France. That's all! Just go through all the records for the past ten years, sort them out, shuffle them around, and see if you can make a pattern. Sometimes you do and sometimes you don't. But always you have to keep your eyes skinned for the one fact or thread which starts the pattern.

It was boring work, and I made endless lists, shuffling them around, hoping for some pattern. Then, when I was on the point of giving up, a slightly odd pattern emerged. In my list—*Lorries: stolen, unrecovered*—I noticed that six came from one area, and in each case the driver had disappeared also! It was the beginning of a pattern.

The six lorries had belonged to different firms of road hauliers in Rennes, Nantes, Angers, St Malo, Dinan, and St Nazaire. From the old police records I made a map showing the positions where the lorries had last been reported, and that made a pattern, too, of a kind. Every lorry had last been sighted within four kilometres of the Forest of Bougie-Villiers which lies some fifteen kilometres to the west of Rennes.

And in the middle of this forest there is a very large and deep lake. That interested me, and I thought I might have something for Papa Grand, but before I asked to see him I did some telephoning.

Papa Grand is Monsieur Alphonse Grand, the head of the department. You never ask to see him unless you think you have got something. He can be jovial and he can be tough; and in the course of the two years you do with the department, if you get more than two black marks against you, you go out with the rating of assez bien only, which isn't by any means uncommon. Over this affair, actually, I got a black mark—but it was to be my only one, thank heaven.

When I went in to see him he was sitting at his desk with his back to the little attic window which overlooks the Seine.

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He was a big, fleshy, whitehaired man of about sixty and, although nobody knew how it had happened, the back of his right hand was badly scarred and one of its fingers was missing. He looked like a jovial, blue-eyed farmer who knew a good glass of Calvados when he tasted it. He came from Normandy.

He said, "Ha, Belain, how are you getting on in the stew-pot?" The stew-pot was our slang name for the department where one just sat and went through stacks of data in the hope of finding a pattern. It could drive you up the wall.

I said, "Patron, I think I have discovered something in it. But I would very much like to get out of it."

"You shall, you shall, in time. Now, let us have this titbit."

I told him then about the lorries, and I finished up, "The significant thing is that none of them has ever been recovered. And nothing has ever been heard again of the drivers. And there is this lake in the Forest of Bougie-Villiers. Do you think the Rennes people might take a day off to drag it?"

He smiled at me. "I know the lake well. Sixty metres deep in places. I've fished it as a boy. Yes, why not? I'll speak to Chenot at Rennes. But before I do, let me have the rest of it."

"The rest, patron?"

"The rest, Belain. You young men are all the same. You come in here with a pattern, but to begin with you only give me half of it. You all stand there like dogs with two tails and don't know you're wagging them, and always—it is practically a ritual—I have to ask for it. Now. The rest."

I grinned. "Well, patron, it is about the drivers. I've spoken on the telephone to the firms concerned, and each one has given me a description which is fuller than the routine police report. Every driver was about forty-five. Every driver was a bachelor and had no local friends. Every driver spoke with a local accent. Some of them were dark-haired, some brown, and some blond. All of them were quiet, sober, undistinguished men. And every driver had a dog that travelled with him in the cab, a terrier kind of dog. Sometimes the dog was white, sometimes brown, sometimes black."

Papa Grand looked up at me and nodded. "You think every driver could have been the same driver? Why not? A man with a white dog, a colour that takes dye. A man who changes his hair colour and style with wigs. Very good. A nice pattern. Leave it with me."

I didn't hear anything from him for over a week and then I was called to his office.

He said, "Belain, do you like shooting—partridge shooting?"

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I said, " No, patron."

" Excellent. It is now the partridge season. I always go down to Rennes at this time of year and have a few days with Chenot. We'll go together, and since you won't want to shoot, you can do the work on this lorry business. We leave in two hours and I'll tell you about it in the car. We'll stay at the Du Guesclin at Rennes, but we'll eat at the Ti-Koz. Their crêpes and their caneton Duchesse Anne are superb."

On the way down in the car, he gave me the results of the dragging of the lake. The six lorries had been found. They had all been driven over a high bluff between the pine trees and into the lake. No bodies had been discovered. Each lorry had been carrying a full load at the time of its disappearance. All their loads were still intact—except for one consignment from each lorry. And that consignment was the same with them all—a packing-case of tinned chicken breasts from a processing firm outside Rennes.

Each case had been on its way to a shop in a different town—their addresses were given on the hauliers' manifests—but Chenot's men had checked and found that the addresses were false, no such firms existed. Chenot's people had certainly worked hard and quickly.

" I've told Chenot," said Papa Grand, " that you will handle this business—as a reward for turning it up." He smiled. " But you will report to me every evening. How fortunate that you do not like partridge shooting. This—" he handed something across to me— " proves, I think, your theory about the six drivers being the same man."

I had in my hands a rather shabby, water-stained brown wig.

" It was found, Belain, in the cab of one of the lorries. I imagine that our driver friend in sending this lorry over into the lake was wearing his wig still. Jumping backwards as he released the handbrake, it must have caught on some projection and been pulled off. No maker's name. But if this were a local man, he probably bought the wig and the others he used locally.

" Chenot is preparing you a list of wig-makers and sellers in Brittany and Normandy. There shouldn't be more than a couple of dozen. You chase wigs and I'll chase partridges." He patted me benevolently on the back.

I was a long time going to sleep that night. Not because of the dinner we had eaten at the Ti-Koz, but because I was thinking about the wig-wearer and those chicken breasts. What Frenchman would have a passion for tinned chicken when he could get fresh chicken? Yet from each lorry a case had been stolen. Just that. Nothing else.

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At dinner, Chenot, who was the head of the Ille-et-Vilaine police department, told us that the canning firm outside Rennes—Gustrom Frères—sent practically the whole of their chicken breast output abroad, chiefly to Morocco and Algeria. The local orders for the missing consignments were by letters which they had had no reason to discredit.

Chenot in the last few days had got a Food Inspector to carry out a spot check on the Gustrom Frères products. Over three hundred tins had been sampled at random and they were all what they were labelled to be. A large export market like theirs, he explained, could be used for smuggling stuff abroad.

Yes, I lay awake for a long time, wondering about it all, and wondering where to start. I had Papa Grand with me—shooting partridges maybe, but missing nothing.

The next morning I decided to start with the Gustrom Frères place. From Chenot I already had a dossier on the brothers. Hans and Felix Gustrom . . . formerly Austrians, concentration camp victims of Hitler . . . after the war they had come to France, obtained citizenship, and started their factory.

At the factory I saw Hans Gustrom. He was a short, barrel-shaped man near his sixties, bald, his face a whitish, unhealthy colour, and he fiddled nervously most of the time with large horn-rimmed spectacles. His brother Felix, he explained, was now an invalid and had little to do with the business. They lived, a couple of bachelors, in a house about a mile from the factory.

I wasn't impressed with Hans and his nervous manner. But it could have been that he had had too long and too severe an experience with officials and police under Hitler and couldn't be easy with authority any more.

"Why should one man get a series of different lorry-driving jobs every six months or so just to steal a packing-case full of your tinned chicken breasts each time he got the chance?"

"I have no idea, monsieur."

"Odd, isn't it? He fakes order letters to get you to consign the cases to nonexistent firms. Don't you usually check the credit standing of new firms who apply to you for goods?"

"No, monsieur. Not unless we have good reason. All business is an act of good faith."

"Haven't you kept the order letters? The last was only nine months ago."

He pushed his glasses to the top of his high forehead, and I could see the pallid skin sweating. "We keep our records for many years. Unfortunately the file with these letters was destroyed by fire some time ago."

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These office fires . . . how does one tell the truth about them? Hans Gustrom didn't impress me, but it could have been his nervousness.

"And you've never come across a man, someone who could have some connection, business or personal, with you who owns a small white dog: an undistinguished sort of man and clearly a native of Brittany or Normandy?"

"No, monsieur."

And after that I was left with the wig. There were forty names on the list, from wig-makers to barbers who sold wigs and old ladies in novelty shops who stocked them. By the end of the second day I began to wish that I liked partridge shooting. "Do you recognise this wig?" "Have you ever sold three or four or five wigs to the same man—a man with a little dog?" On and on.

But in the department this was the kind of thing we were used to doing. We had all the time in the world. You just kept on. Not like the police whose time is limited, who have a hundred other things crowding on them every day.

And every evening I reported to Papa Grand, a beaming, happy Papa Grand who came always into my room after his evening bath to lead me out to the Ti-Koz.

I got my break eventually—in a small barber's shop on the outskirts of Vannes. I dropped the wig in front of the proprietor and said, "Have you seen this before, or ever over the last four years sold any wigs in quantity to—?"

"A moment, monsieur," he interrupted me. "I have bought this business only three weeks ago. It is the previous owner you should question."

"Where and who is he?"

"Torlo Sparini—he's a good Frenchman, despite his name. But he let the business go to hell. He lives in a bungalow over near Rennes. Les Trois Pins, at Montalon."

It was already very late, so I drove back to Rennes with still another dozen names on my list . . .

The next morning it was raining hard. At breakfast, Papa Grand said, "This wig search is showing on you, Belain. I will be noble and come with you—for the morning only."

I said, "I understand, patron, that the weather forecast is that this heavy rain will clear by midday."

He smiled, "Quite right, Belain. An excellent thing, the weather forecast. It enables us to arrange our lives comfortably."

So we went to Montalon together in the car. It was still raining hard. The house was at the end of a long lane off a

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side road. It was quite a big bungalow with three pine trees in the front garden.

Papa Grand told me to go ahead by myself. He had a file of stuff which had come down from Paris that morning, and he sat in the car reading.

An elderly woman answered the door to me, and I was shown into Torlo Sparini's bedroom whose windows looked out over the front garden. He was lying in bed, a middle-aged man with dark hair and a thin, humorous face. Perched on a chair by the bed was a small white terrier kind of dog.

It was the sight of the dog which made me cautious, so cautious that I did not go into my usual routine of questions with him. Usually I explained the whole set-up and described the wig-wearing driver and his dog.

This time, after introducing myself, I said, "You had a barber's business near Vannes recently and made and sold wigs. We are trying to trace this wig. Is it one of yours?"

I handed the wig over to him and he examined it. Then he shook his head.

"Not mine, monsieur. That's all you have, just a wig?"

"That's all. Just the wig."

"I'm sorry, monsieur." He called through the open door for the elderly woman and insisted on serving me a glass of Calvados, and I accepted it. I stayed and chatted generally for a while with him because I had a strong feeling that this was my man and I wanted to learn what I could about him.

When I got back to Papa Grand it was to find him outside the car looking around. I told him of my suspicions, and as we drove back to Rennes he said, "He's in bed with a broken leg, you say? Then he can't move. Now, Belain, I suggest you go to Gustrom and ask him about this Sparini. See if he knows him. Watch his reactions carefully. When you've done that we can make a decision over our crêpes at the Ti-Koz this evening.

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"Without much doubt, he's our man. I found this on his garbage dump at the bottom of the garden." He held up a used tin of Gustrom's chicken breasts. "There were many more like this there, too. Look—a break in the clouds. The weather clears. You can drop me at the hotel before you go on to Gustrom."

So Papa Grand went off to his shooting and I went to see Hans Gustrom. I was quite frank with him.

"I think we've found the man we want. His name is Torlo Sparini and he now lives at Les Trois Pins, Montalon. He's a bachelor, and an old woman comes in and looks after him during the day. At the moment he's got a broken leg so we can pick him up when we want to. He fits the description of the driver we want and he's got this small white terrier dog, and there are scores of your empty tins in his rubbish dump . . ."

As I spoke, I was watching him closely, but he just fiddled nervously with his glasses, and I had no way of telling what he was thinking. "He used to have a small business near Vannes. Does he mean anything to you, Monsieur Gustrom? Torlo Sparini?"

He was silent for a moment, his high forehead creased with frowns, a man thinking hard, and then he shook his head. "No, monsieur. He means nothing—nothing."

"You're sure? He may have used a different name. A tallish, dark-haired man with a thin, humorous kind of face, and this dog?"

"No, monsieur."

And that was it. Gustrom couldn't help us. Or wouldn't. I didn't know which, and wasn't even prepared to guess. Still, we had Sparini, and once Papa Grand began to talk to him it wouldn't take long to break him down.

I made a few more wig-maker calls that afternoon—after all, Sparini might not be our man—and it was nearly seven when I

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returned to the hotel. The clerk at the reception desk handed me a telephone message. He had taken it about ten minutes before I got in.

A Monsieur Sparini telephoned. There is a matter which he would like to discuss with you urgently and immediately.

There it was. Papa Grand wasn't back yet, so I left a note on his bed, together with the message I had received, saying that I had gone out to Les Trois Pins and might be a little late for dinner.

I was at the bungalow within half an hour. I could see the crests of the pines etched against the bright starlit night. Lights showed from the bungalow windows of Sparini's room. I knocked on the front door, but when there was no answer, knowing he lived alone and was temporarily bedridden, I pushed it open and went in.

As I opened his bedroom door I heard the dog barking furiously. The lights were full on, and one of the french windows of the bedroom was half opened, the night air making the thin curtains sway.

Sparini was lying on his bed and there was a small black hole in his right temple, and around the hole were the dark stains of powder but surprisingly little blood. The dog sat on the end of the bed barking furiously.

I began to move across to the bed although I knew there was nothing I could do. But as I moved, a man stepped out from behind the curtains.

A voice said, " Raise your hands, very high, monsieur. High."

A gun was levelled at me and Hans Gustrom came slowly across the room as I raised my hands.

" Turn round." Momentarily, before I obeyed, I saw the sweat on his big white forehead. Then I turned.

He slipped his hand over my pockets and relieved me of my own gun. Then he stepped away from me. As the barking dog relapsed into a thin, melancholy whimpering, he said, " All right. Now sit down over there."

I turned and he was motioning me to a chair in the middle of the room. I sat down, and Gustrom stood between the bed and the chair.

For a moment I saw his shoulders relax and sensed the weariness of a man under great strain. Then he said quietly, " I am sorry about all this. But it is the only way . . . the only way that I can see to save more suffering . . . yes, suffering that I have caused. We get caught, monsieur; caught by our own natures and we make others suffer for us."

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I said, " You've killed Sparini. Why? "

" Because he was a blackmailer, monsieur. He never intended to be, but it happened to him. The chance came and his nature did the rest. Years ago he was driving along behind a lorry when a case fell off the lorry. He stopped, put it in his car, but couldn't catch the lorry. So he took the case home: a case of tinned chicken breasts which he used to feed to his dog. All this he explained to me long ago, but guarding his identity and whereabouts. Only today did I know who and where he was."

" What was in the case? "

" Three hundred tins. But two hundred of them had false bottoms, meat only halfway down. In the base were wads of American dollar bills. Forgeries. But not high class forgeries, monsieur. Good enough though for places like North Africa.

" My brother made them, monsieur. He'd made forgeries for the Nazis during the war—under pressure. And he went on doing it when we came to France. We sold them abroad. But when he wanted to stop, when we had our factory going, I made him go on. I made him, monsieur. So we make people suffer. And then Sparini discovered our secret . . ."

I watched him closely as he spoke, seeking some chance to get at him, but he kept his distance and the gun was always pointed at me. Sparini recognised the forgeries and he blackmailed the Gustroms. But he didn't reveal himself. He did it through letters and telephone calls and he scared the daylights out of them.

Six times in four years he took a month off from barbering and got himself a lorry-driving job. And six times he sent the Gustroms an order and they had to put a special packing-case aboard a collecting lorry on a day named. But each of the three hundred tins had to contain real Bank of France notes.

He bled them for four years and, although they gave up the counterfeiting, the fear and worry ate into the two brothers, making a permanent invalid of Felix. Hans knew there would be no rest until he discovered their blackmailer and killed him. I had given him that chance. But he still meant to preserve himself and his brother.

" I telephoned the message to your hotel, monsieur—not Sparini. You had to be here, because it must look as though Sparini after your first visit knew that his days were numbered. You would come back to him and he knew he was finished. So he called you back. You came into this room and he shot you. His last act. Revenge on you because you were the instrument of his destruction. And then he shot himself.

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" I am sorry, monsieur. But it has to be this way—largely for my brother's sake. I have to shoot you with the same gun as killed Sparini. Revenge and then suicide and then no one left to tell the story, and my brother and I can live in peace."

I made to stand up and he let me rise. " You could just have shot Sparini—made it look like suicide alone."

" No, monsieur. Would you have accepted that? I don't think so. But an act of revenge, then suicide—that is much more convincing. I'm sorry."

He raised the gun a little and I felt the sweat begin to break out on me. This barrel-shaped, whitefaced, nervous, harassed man was quite inflexible. On the bed the dog whimpered gently at the feet of its dead master, and behind me I heard the soft swish of the curtains in the night draught. I couldn't just stand there and be shot. I had to make a bid.

I saw his eyes narrow as he brought himself to the brink of decision—and I jumped for him, flinging myself sideways. There was the roar of a shot, swamping the room with noise, and I felt the searing passage of a bullet close to my neck, and then I was lying full stretch on the floor with Gustrom standing above me.

He stared down at me, then the gun fell from his hand, hitting the floor by my face. He swayed a little, his eyes closing, and then very slowly he collapsed on the floor close to the bed. Blood welled from a wound in his high wide white forehead.

I pulled myself to my knees, my body shaking with reaction, and I was aware of Papa Grand and Chenot, still in shooting clothes, standing above me. Papa Grand held out a silver flask to me.

Papa Grand never said that it was because of this case that I got my black mark. Never said it directly, but I knew that it was so.

What he did say—and this as we drove back to Rennes—was, " Everything, everybody has a potential, clearly marked potentials, Belain, and you must train yourself to observe them. Take Sparini and Les Trois Pins. You went into the house and I stayed outside. I walked round it. You saw a man in bed who said he had a broken leg. Did you ever check this? "

" No, patron."

" You should have done. I did. I phoned the doctor at Montalon. His leg was broken. So, potentially, he couldn't walk anywhere. And he was alone after his serving woman left at about six. Did you check that she did? Perhaps not, but I did—through the same doctor. So, when I found your

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note waiting for me at the hotel and a copy of Sparini's telephone message to you to come at once, I knew that Sparini couldn't have made that telephone call."

"But how, patron?"

"Because there is no telephone in the house. I could see that from outside. The nearest wires were in the main road. That was a potential—the ability to telephone—that didn't exist. And he couldn't walk to a callbox. Then how did he send the message? He didn't. So I got Chenot to come along with me."

He smiled and put a big hand on my shoulder.

"Cheer up, Belain. On the whole you did very well. And anyway, potentially, we're all dead men, aren't we?"

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MATERIAL ENDS

... are of course those raggedy bits at the edge of the cloth that never seem to disappear no matter how much your wife cuts off. All fabrication? Then you will find our quiz a snip—if not sheer along to page 110

1. *Axminster, Aubusson, Gobelins, and Wilton. What is their claim to fortune built on?*
2. *In a famous portrait by Federigo Zucchero, Queen Elizabeth I has worms and mulberry leaves embroidered on her sleeves. Why?*
3. *Who i. wove all day and unpicked all night*
   ii. got into trouble by spinning libellous pictorial anecdotes about the gods?
4. *Who takes silk?*
5. *Who sits on the woolsack?*
6. *The Spinning Jenny is:*
   i. a common wildflower
   ii. a children's game
   iii. a device developed by Richard Arkwright
7. *What is linen-fold?*
8. *"On the rocks," "On ice"—what similar phrases have the meanings:*
   i. in luxury
   ii. being lectured by a superior
   iii. in a considerable state of anxiety
9. *Who wrote i. Died in the Wool*
   ii. The Maker of Heavenly Trousers
   iii. Without My Cloak

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dig that crazy paving

This blessed plot . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Down the green hillside fro' the castle window
Lady Jane spied Bill Amaranth a workin';
Day by day watched him go about his ample
Nursery garden.

Cabbages thriv'd there, wi' a mort o' greenstuff—
Artichokes, seakale, vegetable marrows,
Kidney beans, broad beans, onions, tomatoes,
Early potatoes.

ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH, *Lady Jane*

Sow to Grow

" It was my father gave me my first runners too. Seven beans he give me and I planted 'em beside the door, and I never picked a bean from them that first year, left 'em all for seed.

" And I'll tell you," said Tom, " how I kept mine from the rooks. Each year when it's sowing time I makes a drill and I puts holes in it, and then I walks along it bending down as if I was putting a bean in each hole, and then I rakes it over and I leaves it. And all the time the rooks is watching me, and first light next mornin' they's down looking for those beans and o' course they can't find 'em because they isn't there.

" So that same day then I goes along and makes holes again and pretends I'm putting in beans, and I rakes it over careful and I leaves it, and next mornin' the rooks is there again digging and o' course they can't find none. And I does the same again on the third day. So then the rooks say to themselves, ' He's a silly old coot, he is, he's not putting in beans at all,' so when I does put 'em in on the fourth day they doesn't bother to come into the garden."

ROBERT GIBBINGS, *Till I End My Song*

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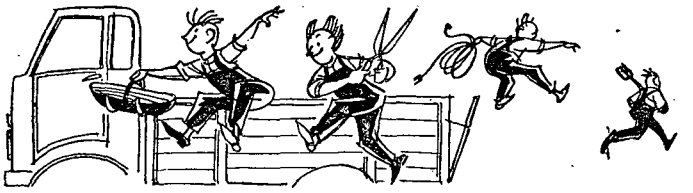

Saying it with Flowers

If Prunus Triloba
Leaves her cold soba
Try Cydonia Japonica
As a come-onica.

If Hybrid Tea-Roses
Gather you no-*ses*
Try Davidii Buddleia
To make her act cuddleia.

GRACE CURLENDER

Yankee Clippers

I did not feel at that time that I could afford the services of a professional gardener, or rather gardeners, for they came in groups. But I used to watch with interest and a little envy how they worked in my neighbour's garden opposite. Once a week a small truck would drive up and, for all the world like firemen, the four or five men in it would leap out and unload their tools.

One would run out a hundred feet or so of electric flex which he would plug in to the house and set to work on the hedges with electric clippers; meanwhile another was mowing the lawn and another trimming the edges of the flowerbeds; another would be taking out the plants from the beds themselves and another following behind him putting new plants in. In less than an hour the job would be done, the team would pile their tools back on the truck, jump in themselves, and drive off to their next job.

BERNARD MOORE, *The Second Lesson*

How her feet tempt! how soft and light she treads,
Fearing to wake the flowers from their beds!
Look how that pretty modest columbine
Hangs down its head, to view those feet of thine!
The lovely violet makes after too,
Unwilling yet, my dear, to part with you;
The knot-grass and the daisies catch thy toes,
To kiss my fair one's feet before she goes;
All court and wish me lay Amanda down,
And give my dear a new green-flowered gown.

N. HOOKES, *To Amanda*, 1653

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ESCAPE FROM EYSSE

By PHILIPPE de VOMECOURT

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Don't be deceived by the casual tone and disarming simplicity of this account! The author, Philippe de Vomécourt—one of three brothers who gave fearless and devoted service to the cause of French Resistance—was from earliest days organiser in the Unoccupied Zone of France, (in contact with Special Operations Executive at Resistance headquarters in London.)

Argosy's extract concerns only one incredibly daring exploit from his Resistance record—Philippe's planning of his escape from Eysse prison . . . to England—told with an ease that brushes danger aside as lightly as the writer did himself.

WE CHOSE the night of 3rd January 1944. There were fifty-three of us.

A young warder had agreed to let us take the key to the main gate from him. A certain amount of arms had been smuggled in to us by another warder.

I had a revolver; it was a source of comfort to me. I had civilian clothing and identity papers. I had stolen some chloroform from the infirmary, and one of the prisoners—a medical student, who worked in the infirmary—was going to administer it. How could any good escape be accomplished without the use of chloroform? I was to regret my attachment to that fiction.

It was now that the " freedom " I had acquired, to walk about the prison at will, came in most useful.

Most of the men who were going to escape were in the cells. There were two British officers among them. (The early Resistance men sent to Eysse had been put in the cells.) But there were a few other members of the escape party in the " chicken cages " in different courtyards.

To get from the courtyards to the building containing the cells, you had to pass through a door in the inner of the two prison walls. As you passed through it and walked to the other building, you were under observation from soldiers armed with machine-guns, rifles, and grenades who stood in box-like constructions on top of the main gate and at vantage points around the outer wall. Normally convicts could pass from the courtyards, through the door to the cells, only when accompanied by two warders. But

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by now the soldiers on the top of the wall had become so accustomed to seeing me strolling around by myself that they assumed I was some sort of head warder; at any rate, I clearly had permission from the prison authorities to pass where other prisoners were not allowed to pass unless accompanied.

The escape began, according to plan, at five o'clock. The men were not yet locked up in their cages. I went to the different courtyards where members of the party were waiting for me. Two and three at a time I led them across to the inner wall, under the gaze of the soldiers, through the door and between the walls to the cells. Backwards and forwards I went, assembling the first group. Pills, the medical student, joined us. Just inside the building was a guardroom. When I went in there with my first party from the courtyard the warder looked up from his desk. He was surprised but not astonished to see us, because I was leading.

"What do you want here?"

I drew my revolver.

"If you make any noise, you'll die," I said. "Put your hands behind your back, and keep quiet." He was trussed up and gagged and dumped into the corner of the room. The first three men I had brought with me stood guard, ready to club any other warder who ventured into the office. While they waited there, I went backwards and forwards to the courtyards, assembling the rest of our party.

When we were complete we advanced cautiously into the main part of the building. We knew exactly where to look for the warders. Moving silently, swiftly, we came up behind them, hitting them over the head, catching them with a stranglehold round their necks, or threatening them with revolvers. None of them gave the alarm. Some half a dozen we left cold on the floor; others we bound and gagged. But I felt we should chloroform at least one of them. The warder we chose might well have said afterwards he would have preferred a straightforward blow over the head.

Pills had given the impression that he knew all about chloroforming. But when we came to it, this young blond giant of a man with the assured manner proved only why he was still a medical student and not yet a doctor.

We presented the warder to him, nicely tied up and helpless. When Pills started pouring the chloroform on to the pad, the man looked terrified. His rat-face and tiny eyes twisted with fear. Pills put the pad over the man's nose and pressed it there. But the chloroform did not seem to work as quickly as Pills had said it would.

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"Just a matter of two or three minutes," he said. He held the pad there, but the man merely continued to appeal frantically with his eyes.

"Hurry up," I said to Pills. "It's six o'clock. We can't afford to waste any time."

"Hurry up," said Pills to the warder. "Go to sleep." He took the pad away and poured more chloroform on to it. The warder gasped out a plea for mercy.

"I don't want to die. Please. Please. I don't want to die." Pills smothered his words with the pad again. Now the warder could only gurgle unintelligibly. But his eyes went on shouting, and he still seemed very awake.

"Damn you, you're not going to die," Pills hissed, sweat standing out on his own face. "Go to sleep, man; you're not going to die but you've got to go to sleep." Still the chloroform did not take effect.

"Come on, come on," I said. "Let's get the job done. How much longer?"

Pills dispensed with the niceties of the textbook doses. He poured the whole bottle of chloroform over the warder's face. Even then, the man did not go to sleep immediately. He yelled. He obviously had a strong heart. It was just as well for him. He finally went under, his face a little burnt.

"Bloody fine doctor you'll make," I said to Pills. "Remind me never to come to you for an operation."

"I don't know what went wrong," said the young man. "I can't understand it. I did exactly as it said in the book . . ."

There was no time for further discussion of the book or of his deficiencies as an anæsthetist. With all the warders out of action, we hurried round the cells, releasing the men who were to escape with us. The Communist leaders called out to us to abandon our escape, but we ignored them. No one thought of turning back now; nor would it have been possible.

We split into five groups. Each group had a leader, dressed in the uniform caps, blouses, and trousers stolen from the warders.

We left the building, and headed between the two high walls for the main gate. It was just getting dusk, and to the soldiers on the wall above us we presented a normal enough sight—five files of men, each accompanied by a "warder."

When we got to the main gate, the young warder who had agreed to cooperate lost his nerve. There was a moment of hesitation. Something, we knew not what, had gone wrong. He backed away from us, and it looked as though we would have to tackle him.

I took up position with my back to the inner wall, revolver in

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hand, looking up at the soldier above us. Then the main gate opened. A black maria came in. This may have been the cause of the young warder's hesitation. But there was no time to think about that.

The gate was open; our way was clear.

"Don't run," I had told my party. "Don't run," I repeated now. It would have seemed normal enough for five warders to walk out of the gate with five squads of convicts. I saw that the soldier did not realise what was happening below him.

But the temptation was too great for the prisoners when they saw the gate opening in front of them. They started to run out.

I was still watching the soldier. He saw the men running. He looked at his table on which there was a grenade. He looked at his machine-gun and back to the crowd of men running out of the gate. What would he do?

I pointed my revolver at him. Had he reached for the grenade or machine-gun, I think he would have died. Then he turned round and pressed the button which gave the alarm throughout the prison.

I followed the men rushing through the gate. Before deciding on the escape plan I had looked beyond the walls from different windows, from the infirmary, from the workshops. I had a picture of the surrounding countryside in my mind, and I knew exactly where we must go.

There were two main roads to cross before we could consider the first stage of escape successful. Each group knew it must cross those roads at particular spots at particular times. Then all five groups would join up at a rendezvous about twenty-five miles away by one o'clock in the morning.

Around the prison were vineyards. The direct way to the main roads lay across them. But vineyards have wires running along them horizontally, wires that are quite high enough to make a party of escaping prisoners tired—especially those still wearing clogs—if they attempted to go across the vineyards, clambering over wire after wire, wire after wire. The quickest and least tiring way was to walk up one field, and down the next, up one and down again.

Our timing was good. My group of old men made the crossing of the main roads well within the schedule. I saw the other groups cross.

We moved on rapidly, out of sight of the roads.

Our plan had been a good one. The dusk helped us. Only a few minutes after we had all crossed we heard the roar of motor bikes and lorries rushing up and down those two roads.

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The failing light had concealed our precise direction of escape. For the moment we were safe. And free again.

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For nearly three weeks, with the aid of Resistance helpers, our group remained under cover and slowly managed to move across France in the direction of the Spanish frontier, eventually reaching a farm just outside Fources.

For a few days we were able to relax. Then a truck and a car, both running on illicit petrol, came to take us to the small town of Montréjeau, south-west of Toulouse and only about thirty miles from the Spanish frontier. In Montréjeau, we were told by our friends who were helping us, we should make contact with a passeur, highly experienced in the work, who would take us across the Line into the forbidden Frontier Zone, and thence we would prepare for our journey across the mountains into Spain.

When we reached Montréjeau we hid the vehicles, and two of us went into the town to the address we had been given. As we neared the house, I feared the worst.

At the end of the street we saw a man lolling against a wall, reading a newspaper. There was another in a similar pose opposite our house. And a third at the back of the house.

The signs were all too familiar. These men were waiting for anyone who went to the house. That is what we thought, and that is what we discovered to be true. From neighbours and shopkeepers we learnt that the passeur had been arrested only a short while before. Our well-organised way out of the country had been cut.

We could only think ourselves lucky not to have been caught at the same time.

" I know some other people in the town," I said to my companion, " let's try them."

So we made the rounds of Montréjeau and found friends who, while without experience of the work, were anxious to help us to get through. We hid away for a couple of days in the town.

On the third day we met in a small restaurant. There we were picked up by a van. It was a large van normally used to take materials up to a dam which was being constructed in the mountains. We were assured of the help of the owners of a little shack and restaurant alongside the dam, where the workers came to eat.

We knew the dangers that awaited us. First there were the French Customs, accompanied by French police. We felt we could cope with them. But there were also German patrols, accompanied by dogs. In winter—and this was the beginning of

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February—the Germans were on skis. In the deep snow, an encounter with them could have only one result; men on foot, unaccustomed to the mountains, could have no chance of outstripping them.

The van arrived at the restaurant in Montréjeau on time. We were all feeling pretty fit and eager for the last stage. Our spirits were high. The late afternoon sun was brilliant, the air cold and clean. In the distance, in a metallic sky, we could just see the outlines of the snow-capped mountains. They looked beautiful; we had yet to meet them at close quarters to know their true nature.

Our ride provided its full quota of the usual aches and hazards. We clambered into the back of the van which already contained some small pieces of machinery and bags of cement. Each of us took cover under the cargo until not one of us could be seen. It was as well that we hid ourselves thoroughly. Halfway up the steep mountain road, a German patrol stopped us.

We heard the voices of the Germans talking to the driver.

"What are you carrying?"

"Oh, the usual," said the driver phlegmatically.

"What do you mean—the usual?" asked a German.

"The *usual*," the driver repeated. "Cement—bags of it—and that kind of thing."

"We will see for ourselves *the usual*," said the German.

The doors at the back of the van were unbolted, and crashed open against the sides of the vehicle. German heads peered in. They could see only the expected load of materials needed for the construction work on the dam.

They did not attempt a search. The doors were slammed shut on us again, and in the darkness we heard the driver ordered to go on. We eased our cramped limbs and exhaled deep breaths. No one spoke. There was no need for words to communicate our relief.

The van bumped and ground its way up the road until it was within two hundred yards of the dam itself. There it stopped. The driver came round, opened the doors at the back and, with a deal of groaning, we disentangled ourselves from his load.

"You'll be all right there," said the driver, pointing to the little café.

It was now almost nightfall. The weather had changed completely. The sky was sullen and snow was falling, driven by a high wind which bit into our faces. We waved a brief thanks and farewell to the driver who hurried back to his cab. The engine coughed and throbbed.

We crept away into the darkness towards the café. We

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approached, as we had been told to do, by a side door. The van drew up outside the front, ahead of us. The driver slipped into the bar to nod to the owners, letting them know that we were arriving.

"Absolute quiet," I said to my party. I lifted the latch of the side door and let us in. The light from the bar showed us the bare room in which we were to wait; the far door, locked, led into the bar itself. We could hear voices raised in conversation. Every word came through to us. After some minutes of tense silence in the room, we heard another door slam. The conversation in the bar ceased. The door leading into our room was unlocked, and a man came in.

"All right?" he whispered.

"All right," I said.

"Nothing to worry about at the moment," he said. "My wife will bring you some food—and some coffee. But you'll have to keep quiet. We never know who's going to come in next door. And don't go out again—someone might see you."

The food and drink arrived; and, after it, we gladly went to sleep. Hard floors held no terror for us now. We heard the wind outside. But it was—outside. We were safely sheltered for the moment at least.

Next morning, with daylight, we discovered two unwelcome things. One was that the weather had become even worse. Great gusts of wind were driving the snow now, making it impossible to think of starting our journey over the mountains.

The second was that German patrols came past every hour. They regularly called into the pub to say their good mornings before moving on.

We were expecting a Spaniard to come to fetch us. He was coming from Spain on the understanding that he would receive a fee for each man he took across the Pyrenees. There was no hope of his coming in this weather.

We spent one day, two days, three days, locked up in that room waiting for him, with the wind and the snow beating at the little restaurant.

We heard the German patrols crunch into the bar at their scheduled times. We listened to the lorry drivers and the workers from the dam lifting their voices in conversation and argument. And we had to stay put—and very quiet.

The strain mounted. There were now sixteen of us. We had picked up a sick man, a Czech pilot who had been working for the Resistance in Le Havre. He was just getting over a bout of pneumonia, but was still weak and very weary.

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The revival of spirits, amounting to a feeling of exhilaration, which we had experienced immediately before the ride into the mountains, was now completely dissipated again. Once more, it was a question of hanging on.

The tension was all the higher now, because we were so near to making good our escape.

The need for discipline was proportionately greater. We had to maintain a strict silence virtually the whole time. And there was still the risk, while we waited, that a German patrol would spot our presence or accidentally push into the room and find us there.

We understood that when the weather was too bad the Germans went into the pub and stayed there, sometimes asking for the use of the room we now occupied to lie down and rest until the end of their patrol.

The Czech was a constant worry. His illness made him a dangerous liability. Pills, the young medical student, who was still with us, looked after him as best he could, but the Czech was an unwelcome additional burden to us.

The wind screamed around the room, the sun stayed out of sight. We kept watches round the clock for the Spanish guide. We had to mount a watch also whenever one of us wanted to relieve himself. The privy was outside in the snow.

On the fourth day the weather cleared for just a couple of hours. The sun came out, glinting on the high drifts of snow, revealing the peaks that rose above us.

Then the Spaniard arrived: a strong, dark, taciturn man. He brought no hope with him.

" The weather's too bad. I can't take you on yet. It would be madness in this—you'll have to wait a day or two."

We did not like the sound of that. We had already waited longer than we liked, and I doubted whether we could hang on much longer without our being caught.

" I'm going down to the village," said the guide. " I'll come back for you when the weather's right." He started to leave us.

This was unbearable. At least we now had a guide. We must keep him with us, so that the moment a chance appeared for leaving we could take it.

" You're not going down," I said. " You're staying here." He turned round and I faced him with a revolver.

He shrugged.

" If it clears up," I said, " we'll make a dash for it."

"All right," he said. And he went to sleep in the pub, lying down out of sight under the counter.

We continued our watch on the weather and the German

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patrols. At one o'clock in the morning, the man on watch shook me by the shoulder. "Look, patron."

I looked, and saw the moon shining. I got up and went into the bar and awakened the Spaniard.

"I think we can go," I said. He showed no keenness for the idea.

"Come on out and see," I said. He came into the open with us. He looked up into the sky. There was still cloud, but it had lifted. The moonlight bathed the snow about us. He studied the sky for some moments.

"It's good enough, isn't it?" I said.

He went on looking.

"Well?" I pressed him.

"Yes, I think we can risk it," he said. "I think we'll have enough time to get across to the other side before there's any more snow."

Now that he had agreed on the operation, I was concerned with the detailed risks. I pointed to the virgin snow. We should leave our tracks in it.

"What about the Germans passing here?"

My watchkeeper answered me. "We've got three-quarters of an hour before they come again."

"Time enough," said the Spaniard. "But we must hurry."

I rushed back into the café, and woke up the other men.

"Get dressed—quick. We're moving off."

They did not need telling twice.

Not all of us had adequate clothing for the journey ahead, but we had to put up with it. We had managed to get boots or shoes for all but one, who was wearing tennis shoes: that was all we could find for him.

I had provided everyone with a good stout stick, and three of us had ropes. Not a perfectly equipped party for mountaineering, but we had some of the essentials. I watched them hurrying to get ready, and then realised one problem remained. The Czech pilot was also struggling to get dressed.

I stared at him.

He caught my look.

"I'm coming," he said determinedly.

I looked towards Pills.

"Don't take him. Don't. He could never hold out," said the young medical student.

We had reckoned on a twenty-four-hour walk across the mountains. Twenty-four hours in the snow and bitter cold for a man just recovering from pneumonia was out of the question.

"He won't have a chance," said Pills.

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" Right," I said. " You stay behind," I told the Czech.

He lost his temper.

" I tell you I'm coming. You've no right to stop me. I've got this far and I'm crossing over with you."

I called in the Spaniard. " Look," I said.

As he watched, I took out the money for the Czech's passage and tore it in half. I gave one half to the Spaniard, the other half to the Czech.

" You understand you'll get the other half when you take him across," I said to the Spaniard.

He nodded.

"And you understand," I said to the pilot. " You can be sure now this man will come and fetch you as soon as he can and take you across the mountains. But you've got to get your strength back first."

" No," said the Czech. " I am coming with you. You cannot deny me the right to escape."

" I am not denying you your escape. I'm telling you that if you try to escape now you'll merely die. If you wait, this man will get you to safety."

" I will not wait," said the pilot. He finished lacing his boots.

" Listen to me—very carefully," I said. " I mean every word I say. If you come with us, you will not only throw your own life away, but you'll be risking the lives of everyone else."

" I am coming. I shall not die."

" For the last time," I said, looking straight into his eyes, " I tell you that you must wait. If I have to, I will shoot you rather than risk the lives of fifteen men for the sake of one."

" I don't care what you say. I am coming with you," said the Czech.

I turned my back on him.

" Get going," I said to the guide. " I'll come after you. I'll follow your tracks and wipe them out behind me."

The Spaniard went out, the others followed. The Czech pilot and I watched them as the guide led the single file of men away from the café up the slope, their feet sinking deeply into the virgin snow.

I followed slowly after the last of them. I stood by a tree, fifty yards from the café, watching them receding above me. The Czech came towards me.

" If you go past this tree," I said to him carefully, " I will shoot you." I held the revolver in my hand.

" I've told you I don't care," he said. Then he added, " If you shoot me, the Germans will hear you and they'll catch you."

" I'll take that chance. I'll shoot you, I'll wait for the Germans

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to come, and then I'll run for it. They may get me, but it'll keep them off the track of the others. But you're not going to stop those fourteen from getting away. I just can't let you do it."

We stood there in the moonlight facing each other, a few yards apart, measuring each other's resolution.

" If you were to shoot me, it would be murder," he said.

" If I let you go with the others, I'd be abetting the murder of fourteen men. I am responsible for them. If you call it murder to stop you, then, all right, I'm prepared to murder you."

" I am *coming*," he said. And he started to walk towards me.

He walked up to the tree, and raised his foot as though he was going to take the next step past it.

I was suffering an agony of conscience. I was faced with an appalling decision. But I was determined to shoot if he took the next step. I was certain that if he were to come with us he would be caught. And all, in turn, would be caught.

" One more step and I shoot," I warned him, raising my revolver and taking aim.

The metal of the revolver glinted in the moonlight. The face of the Czech, staring at me in hatred, was drained of colour. My hand, clenched about the gun, felt numb with the cold and the pressure. I noticed that it trembled a little.

" One more step . . ." I threatened him.

Another minute of terrible silence. Then the Czech turned towards the restaurant again. He walked away without a word.

If I had any doubts about my decision to leave him behind, they disappeared as soon as I set off after the rest of the party.

I had lost about fifteen minutes in all, and now I had to run to catch them up. " Run " is a euphemism, for with each step I sank into the knee-deep snow. Walking was difficult enough, but hurrying, as I had to, the effort was killing.

I was in excellent condition but my legs, within minutes of starting, were as weak as those of a man allowed up after a long spell in bed. I felt as though I were carrying the weight of a diver's boots on my feet. Each step was a conscious effort.

The guide had led the others at a fast pace, and it took me more than half an hour to catch them up. None of us wasted any breath on conversation or explanation of what had happened to the Czech. The others merely turned round, acknowledged with their eyes that I had joined them, and went on walking, up and up, through the soft snow, sometimes sinking down to the thighs in it. I could never have imagined the desperate exhaustion of crossing the Pyrenees in winter. We pressed our lips tightly together and fought for good lungfuls of air in the thinning atmosphere.

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We were about two hours away from the restaurant by the dam when one of the men, whose fitness throughout had been first class, started dragging his feet.

He staggered. He fell, unconscious. The mountain air had knocked him out.

I called a halt to the party.

" A blanket. And ropes." We wrapped him up in the blanket and then trussed him like a sailor's hammock. Between us, taking it in turns, we dragged him by the ropes, dragged him through the snow up the mountains, one slow gasping step following another. The moon still shone on us, but our heads were down, fighting against the snow, the air, and the boisterous, biting winds.

From time to time, for a few minutes, the man recovered enough to walk a little. Then he collapsed again and sagging limbs groaned once more with the task of dragging him.

For hour upon hour we dragged him, two men tugging at the ropes over their shoulders so that their burden should not dig into the snow and impede progress even more. Their hands, clutching the ropes, froze into an agonising rigidity.

Every hour we stopped for two minutes. We all rubbed our feet with snow. Not all of us had the warm clothing we should have had for the trip, and it was essential that, at least, we should try to avoid frostbite and keep the blood circulating.

We rubbed the snow over our feet, our hands, and all over our faces. We performed our actions in a sort of dumb agony. We were drawing on that last reserve of energy and resolution to get us over the mountains. Any one of us might have yielded to the appalling desire to lie down in the snow and rest. But we knew it would be our last rest on earth.

The deep, red pain in the chest, the burning eyes, the shaking limbs had to be ignored; the lungs must go on fighting for breath, the legs must always be forced to take that step before which they protested.

The mountains were a white torture. Like chained men, with a slavemaster flogging us all the way, we stumbled higher and higher. Not a single other creature did we see. Not even a chamois. Animals that had their homes in the mountains found themselves shelter while sixteen men, plugged with benzedrine, fought against total fatigue and despair, saying to themselves over and over again, " There must be an end; God, let there be an end."

We climbed over the highest part of the Pyrenees. If there was any boasting to be done, it was not to be done then. To survive was the height of our ambitions.

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Daylight came, and with it a brittle sunshine, and we were still climbing upwards. We had almost reached the highest point of our climb, beyond which lay the frontier, when on the mountain opposite us we saw a patrol. Not a German patrol, but a Spanish. Their nationality was irrelevant. We must not be seen.

We had to lie down for an hour in the snow, our limbs and extremities freezing while we watched the patrol. We watched them, a single line of men on skis, appearing and disappearing in the distance. At last it seemed they had finally gone, and we were able to get up.

Our whole bodies had stiffened. We rubbed snow over ourselves to stimulate the blood, and beat ourselves with our hands.

A last ridge confronted us before we could begin the journey down. That last hill seemed to demand even more energy than we had needed already. And just as we were dragging the man in his blanket towards the crest, I became suddenly blind. Blind from the snow and the wind; blind from fatigue.

I called to Pills. " I can't see a thing."

He looked at me.

" Your eyes are completely bloodshot," he said. " Take some more benzedrine."

I asked Pills to walk in front of me. I put my hand on his shoulder and followed him in that way. I could see nothing more than the vague silhouette of his body.

We walked slowly upwards. I was walking in darkness although it was still daylight. I felt the ground level off: we must be at the top. Pills stopped.

" Listen," he said. " We're walking on practically nothing from now on. For God's sake, be careful. There's a precipice on either side of us—straight down—a very long way. Don't step out of line. Keep right behind me with every step."

Slowly, slowly, feeling every step before taking it, I followed him. I was very frightened. I tried to black out my imagination, but my blindness seemed to increase its activity. I could " see " the precipice even more clearly than my eyes could have shown it to me. Time disappeared and fear mounted because my eyes could not put a limit to my danger. I could not tell whether I was walking in a straight line or not. My balance was disturbed, and I felt more than once as though I was about to topple. My hand dug deeper into the other man's shoulder.

Then we stopped.

We were at the top, and over the worst of it. There was room here, Pills said, to sit down. I had not told anyone else of my blindness. Now, when they spoke to me, I could only guess where they were. I did not try to turn my head in the direction

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from which a voice seemed to speak; it was less suspicious that I should speak straight ahead of me.

It was now, Pills told me, dusk. We had taken seventeen hours to reach the top, of which every minute could be measured in the infinite weariness of our bodies. As the night came on, and we felt the cold creeping over us, we rested. For one hour we allowed our limbs a respite from labour. Then we started going down again.

It was much easier during the descent. I still walked, with my hand on the medical student's shoulder, at the back of the party, but with much less difficulty. The snow was less deep almost from the start of the descent, and quite soon it had disappeared altogether.

Then my sight began slowly to return. The going down and the benzedrine were doing me good. The shape in front of me became much more defined; though my sight was still far from normal, it was good enough for me to walk, carefully, without help, and I knew it was improving all the time. The fear of permanent blindness, secretly nurtured before, was dispelled.

The guide told us we had passed safely over the frontier. We were now in Spain. A silent cheer passed among us.

He took us to a cave. It was cold inside, but we settled down to rest for the few hours until daybreak.

In the early morning we set off for a small village nearby. There we bought some food. It was the most expensive meal I have ever had. For one thousand francs a head we received a garlic soup, in which there was a piece of bread; another piece of bread, an inch thick and the size of my hand; one egg; and one glass of wine. In 1944, one thousand francs was worth a rather better meal than that. But we had been able to take little food with us into the mountains, and our main concern was food of any kind, not the price of it.

My eyes were much better. We continued walking down the mountains. As we were walking along a ridge, I stopped the party and pointed to a fir tree.

"Listen," I said, "you're going to say I'm either a madman or a fool, but you'll always remember this. Just look at this fir tree. A most extraordinary thing has happened. Do you see? There's mistletoe growing on it."

They all smiled at me. Tolerantly. Compassionately.

"You've never seen," I said, "and probably you'll never see again mistletoe growing on a fir tree. You'll probably never even hear of it again in your lifetime. We'll all remember this day by that mistletoe."

Farther down, in a valley, we found a poor makeshift shelter

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in what was not much more than a hole in the ground. It protected us only slightly from the bitter winds. We built a fire alongside the hole and huddled round it, trying to get a little heat into our tired bodies. One man went off with the guide to the British Consul at Barcelona, taking a message from me. I asked the Consul to come to fetch us.

Then, as so often after our escape from Eysse, we settled down to wait. Before, we had been exposed to more dangers, perhaps, but never had we waited in such primitive conditions. Our ragged party tried hard to keep up their spirits.

"It can't be long now . . ."

"We're over the worst, anyway . . ."

"At least there are no Gestapo or Miliciens here . . ."

"Oh, for a great warm fire, a thick soup, and great hunks of bread . . ."

We wrestled with a Spanish mountain sheep and caught it. A tough, shaggy beast that smelt appallingly. We killed it, skinned it, and cooked it, after a fashion. It was more like goat to eat, but it was food, and it kept us going. We ate the whole sheep between us while we waited. That, and a little tea we were able to make, was our diet for three days.

The wind screamed over the black, bare, rugged landscape. But the mountains, majestically, formidably ugly, as they seemed now, and would always seem after our battle with them, were behind us, a vast white towering menace we had fought and endured.

After two days we had a message from the Consul, saying he was coming to fetch us. He arrived the next day, bringing two cars. The cheers that greeted him were silent ones, but we all cheered, nevertheless. It was now the second week of February—five weeks since we had knocked out the warders at Eysse and escaped.

My journey to Gibraltar via Barcelona and Madrid was uneventful. The diplomatic cars protected us from arrest, and from the splendidly gaudy Spanish civil guards we received salutes all the way.

We were never again to take such pleasure in good food. We ate oranges for the first time in years. We luxuriated in hot baths. And at the Embassy we had tea, in ritual English fashion, at four o'clock.

I was taken to the Spanish Foreign Office, bearing two passport photographs of myself. A Spanish hand was held out, palm upwards, and received a number of pound notes. I became a Spaniard, with a Spanish passport. I took my party, who rejoined me in Madrid, to a Spanish music hall; my Spanish was

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not all that might have been expected of a Spaniard—I found I had bought fifteen rows, instead of fifteen seats.

I had a sleeping compartment on the night train from Madrid to the south coast. During the night officials woke me up, checked my identity, discovered I was a good Spaniard, and passed on down the train. .

At a small station near Gibraltar, a porter told me this was where I should get off. "Walk out of the station," he said, "turn left and you'll find friends waiting for you."

And sure enough, there was a jeep, with three British officers.

They drove me to Gibraltar and smoothed my way into the British possession. A colonel gave me a "first priority" for a flight back to England, but I had to wait a day before taking off because of bad weather conditions. I was in no hurry any more. I strolled around Gibraltar, content to soak in the physical sensation of being free.

On board the aircraft, I was tired and went to sleep; so did Hudson, the British officer who had escaped from Eysse with me. The flight was agreeably without incident. We had had enough incidents to last us for a while.

We landed at an R.A.F. base on the south coast of England. I think I was scarcely aware of the name of the place. It did not matter to me. For the moment I was incurious, allowing others to do the work and make the decisions. Hudson and I were now separated. As a British officer, but a non-Briton, I had to be checked out in a different way from him.

"Good-bye; see you soon," said Hudson. And I waved to him as he walked away.

I was taken with another man, also French, to a police station near the air base, and given a good strong cup of English tea, while telephone calls passed between the officer-in-charge and London. Then two plainclothes men came to us.

"Come along," they said, "we're going to London."

They took us to the railway station, and we all boarded a train for London. We had a reserved compartment to ourselves, just the four of us. We had newspapers to read, and could chat easily about the war in Italy and in the Far East.

The complete assurance in the defeat of the Germans expressed by those two Special Branch men was as good a welcome to Britain as I could have desired. © Philippe de Vomécourt 1961

Philippe de Vomécourt parachuted back into France before D-day, fighting with the Resistance to the final phase as he describes in his enthralling book, "Who Lived to See the Day," published this month by Hutchinson—from which our extract is taken.

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SINGING WIND

He listened, his eyes on the dark window, his heart beating

BY D. SLEIGHTHOLME

THE LIGHTS came on as the train rounded the hillside. Brooke glanced again sidelong at the girl. She was looking down into the wide bowl where the little seaport lay; the rainy dusk had filled it and it brimmed with early night. The train ventured out upon the hillside and hung there, clattering slowly over a void in which a few blurred lights showed before the tunnel took it.

Her reflection in the dark window was delicate, like a face in a miniature. The dim blue daylight came, and Brooke looked again at her tired young face too heavily made up, her cheap over-fashionable clothes, the cardboard luggage bearing the labels of third-rate hotels all along the line from New York to Eastbourne. He had cleared his throat several times but he hadn't spoken. The train was almost in. He spoke.

"Well, this is about it!"

"Huh? Oh, oh sure. I was miles away." She looked a shade hungry, a shade tired, a shade lonely. She knew it and made an effort. "I guess I should have got here earlier, but you know how it is: agents to meet—I'm an actress, you see—and bookings to arrange. I had to leave my car at the airport too."

Brooke smiled and passed a hand across his mouth. "You're going to appear here? Isn't it a bit quiet down here at this time of year?"

"Ah well, perhaps; but then it's end-of-season work, and I guess I wanted to have a look at the place." She turned away from him to glance out of the window. "You see, my mother lived here once—oh a long, long time ago."

"I'll be looking out for you," Brooke said. "Where did you say you're playing?"

"I didn't—and I'm a singer," the girl said. The train was slowing. She rose and reached for her bag.

"I don't know your name."

The squealing brakes drowned her answer. There was no second chance. She seemed anxious to leave the train, and he

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guessed why. There were people queueing at the barrier and he lost her there. The oil lamps showed golden needles in the dusk and there was a wind swaying a row of pine trees. He stood for a moment looking for her, then he went forward.

He made his way straight to the address on the quay. It was a dark, black box of a house. He knocked on the door.

A small man opened it. He wore frayed slippers, his face was flat—a small mean flat face like a budgerigar's.

"I'm Brooke. I wrote to you—you're Captain Nye?"

"No, not me; the captain only lodges here. Come in, sir; I've been expecting you and he knows you're coming."

Brooke saw a woman in a shapeless housecoat watching him from the inner room. "If you've come to take that old ship away, then you're welcome, Mr. Brooke. We've give that old man a home for the last twenty years, and not a thank you have we had. He sits up there and takes all we do for granted!"

"Yes, Clarrie, maybe we can talk to Captain Brooke later." He turned to Brooke. "Don't expect him to welcome you—not on a night like this."

"I don't get you."

The woman broke in again. "He'll be listenin'; he won't have many more chances. He's sat up there and listened to the howl of that old hulk's rigging till it near drives me wild—him and his mad fancies. Thank God, all that'll be stopped."

"It's no plan of mine," Brooke said. "My job is to tow her safely round the coast to the breaker's yard; I'm paid for that. Why does he listen, though? What does he hear?"

"I don't suppose you know, but he's blind, Mr. Brooke. He sits and listens and listens for—something he fancies he'll hear, every year round about this date."

They had paused at the foot of the stairs. Above them a naked bulb lined their faces like a small, cold moon. A door rattled in the rising wind, and at once there was another sound: a deep, vibrant note, low as a bass string, rising then falling to silence.

"The ship?" Brooke asked.

The small man nodded. "That row drives me mad. Twenty years she's laid out there at the quay, rotting away. Now he can't pay any more harbour dues on her, and they've taken her over in lieu so she can be scrapped—but you know all that."

"All years of good money wasted," the woman put in.

Their shadows went before them up the narrow stairs, Brooke's tall and slim-hipped, the smaller man's leaning as he turned to whisper, "Remember, he won't welcome you. He'll be listening in case she sings!"

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The wind had come up with the dusk. Outside, the ink-blue dusk seemed alive with rain-chilled little squalls which went hunting through the town. The ship moaned musically again.

"In case who sings?" Brooke asked in a whisper.

The man made no reply, but pointed to a door at the end of the passage. He turned and went back downstairs.

Brooke knocked at the door, waited, knocked again, and then lifted the wooden latch and went in. The room was in darkness save for a bar of light from the open door. He saw the pale rectangle of the window which was open with curtains streaming. The night filled the room with the sound of wind and the flat spatter of rain. There was a bed and in it, sitting upright, a dim figure which leaned forward.

The hands were discernible: big hands now thin with age and held out grasping—and they were moving, weaving in the half light, a familiar movement to Brooke. He realised suddenly, recognised the catch-and-hold, the to-and-fro motions of hands at the spokes of a ship's wheel.

"Captain Nye!"

It seemed he was staring blindly into the rain-filled darkness, beyond and beyond to where some remembered night thundered with the high, wild wind of the Western Ocean, and the seas came bellowing like bulls—an old man, massive once.

"Captain Nye!" Brooke said more loudly.

The hands became still and sank to the coverlet. In the slit of light from the door Brooke saw the chin and the lips, the bitter, lonely mouth.

"Well, Mr. Brooke?" It was a deep bass voice.

"I've come for your ship, sir—I'm sorry."

"How should you be?"

Brooke was stung. "How should I not be, sir? I'm a seaman."

The silence between them grew hard to bear. Nye broke it. "She's an old ship. My father had her, then I. She grew old on the Western Ocean and she took all I had to give. She's all I have now, Brooke."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"You're—sorry." He made a sneer of it. "She's old, Brooke; she may never reach your knacker's yard."

"I think she will."

"You've never lost a ship, man?"

"No."

Nye gestured with his hands. "It wouldn't be—to your discredit if—if she foundered?"

Brooke closed his eyes. "No. I'm sorry, Captain; I can't help you."

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"Brooke. I want to ask you—a favour." It seemed that the word stuck in his throat. Perhaps the favours he'd asked during his life could have been counted on one hand, Brooke thought. "Don't take the ship away for a few more days, I only ask you that. A week perhaps, that's what I ask."

"Why? May I know why?"

"I can't tell you that."

"Captain Nye, the weather is tricky and if it sets fair then I must go, sir. You're a seaman; surely you—"

"Thank you, Captain Brooke, forget it."

"Now wait a minute."

"Please get out, sir!"

The old man half turned, and his eyes stared at him and through him in the way of the blind. Brooke saw the face grow hard.

"I'll thank you to get out of my room, Mr. Brooke."

Brooke sighed and walked to the door. "Good night, Captain Nye."

The old man wasn't listening. The wind had come squalling over the harbour and the ship outside was shrilling high. He was murmuring something. "Lord of pity," he said with his breath, "let her sing for me just once."

Downstairs the small man waited. "Was I right?"

Brooke nodded. "He spoke of singing."

"That? A fancy, that's all. Old men are childish."

"What singing?"

"A fancy. It's not healthy, Mr. Brooke, just not healthy."

Impatiently Brooke said his good night and left the house . . .

There was the disused quay and a few street lights; a rusty sign, squawking like a hen, swung from a building. There was the schooner at the quayside, tall-masted, black, rigging flying in rotting bights. The harbour waves reared like little black tents, slapping and leaping.

Brooke stood and looked at her, seeing her as she had once been, giving her drum-taut sails, and picturing her as she reared and drove, sidelights staining the driven spray with red and green, helmsman braking the vicious wheel. He stood for a long time.

He was lodging at the inn on the waterfront, having come in advance of his small tug to make preliminary arrangements for the tow. He sat, later that evening, and thought about the job, a job which was not to his liking.

He had a seaman's sentiment about an old ship at the hands of the breakers. He was making a precarious living with his tug

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and he had men to pay and the bank to pay for his tug. He couldn't afford to pass the job over.

He sat in the bar and thought about the old man. It nagged him like a tooth. Nye had been a hard man. Brooke was a hard man too and he knew, perhaps sensed, how it might be to grow old and alone, lose authority and power, living in darkness and a past, listening for—for what? Brooke wondered.

He sat on, hardly noticing the passage of time. The voices of the customers and the beat of rain on the window were a background to his mood. The barman roused him at last.

"You can drink after hours if you're minded, sir."

Brooke noticed that the bar was empty and the shutters were being put up. A haze of tobacco smoke eddied in the draught.

"Oh? Yes, sure, I'll have a Scotch—and you?"

The barman was a squarefaced man with a seaman's far-gazing eyes—but a seaman long ashore. "Obliged, sir. I'll have a bitter."

When he had brought the drinks he said, "So she'll be goin' at last, eh. That old heller up there's goin' to miss her, sir."

"I guess so." He paused, sipping his drink. "You knew him maybe, in the old days?"

"Oh, I knew him. I was a young lad just starting at sea when Nye was sailing out of here. He was the bogy-man to us lads. 'Ship with Bully Nye,' they'd say, 'and you forget how to sleep.' He was like that, sir: no let up, no quiet, just drive and drive, that's how he come to lose his wife. He were the damn best seaman on the coast, though, and he thought his ship was God; he had no love in him—save for that ship."

"You mentioned his wife?"

"Yes. She were lost off Newfoundland—about this time of year. Nye were drivin' in the first of a rising gale. That's how it went. Nobody saw her go. She'd been standin' out there like she used to do when she was afeared, and singing—singing at the wind the way she'd do and . . ."

"Singing?"

"She was frightened of the sea—yet he took her with him—tried to teach her to love it like he did. She was small and gentle, poor soul, but she'd sing when the gales came blowin' just to show him she was unafraid. She was spirited like a lion, sir."

"He listens . . ."

"They've told you that, have they? Oh, he listens on wild nights. Always the same old song, it was. Sweet and low, and something about the western sea. I forget now, but that was what she'd sing."

"Thanks for telling me."

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"Everybody here knows the story, sir." He paused, listening to the wind. "This wind'll ease before dawn. Rest well, sir."

There was a time before daylight when the wind fell to squalling and began to veer. Brooke was dreaming, and in his dream there was a tall mast which stood laden with the arching, shrilling wires and ropes of a schooner's rigging. The sound was distant and half lost in the rushing wind.

He slept again, and when next he awoke the sun had risen on a pale-washed watercolour world of calm.

Brooke was checking the old ship over. She was bleached like paper by salt wind and sun and rain. She lay at the quay, leaning a little, grass growing from her rotting decks, a long-hulled, powerful deep-water ship. Aloft her two tall masts were hung with frayed rigging and rusty wire. Her hull was rotten and stained with the red rust of her slack fastenings, she was finished as a ship. That she could still lift on the tide and move on the slow breathing of the sea was all that linked her with what she had once been.

He went below. The captain's stateroom, a tiny triangular space, was a shadow-haunted, musty place. He saw a rotting curtain, a jar containing some blackened wisps which might have been flowers, an embroidered cushion now rotting and blotched with mildew.

He pulled open some of the lockers, in curiosity maybe, looking for something which would link him to the sad woman who had lived here. The lockers were empty save for a few old newspapers which had once lined the shelves, a broken plate, the remains of a shoe—a woman's shoe.

He was turning to go on deck when he noticed an odd thing. The cabin had been panelled *behind* the lockers at some distant time. Perhaps the lockers had been built over the old panels at a later date. He peered into the dark space and saw that there was a cavity beyond, a low, deep space running up into the stern. Curious, he struck a match and looked closer. That inner panelling had warped away from its framework during the years at the quayside.

He pulled away the rotting woodwork. In the space behind it there was something lying. He reached and dragged it forward—and dragged out the other things which were there. There was a straw-filled palliass, a jar still containing a little water, a candle stub burnt low in a pool of grease, and a handkerchief—a woman's handkerchief.

Brooke thought, A woman could have hidden in this place, lying in the dark, lighting her candle for a few precious minutes

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when she dared, listening to the swilling, sighing, booming water close to her cheek, listening to the rudder creak and the distant shout of the crew. She might have heard Captain Nye as he sat at the table there and she'd have wondered if he was sorrowing—wanted to give herself away, go to him . . . she would have lain weeping and biting her lip.

Then there would have come a time when it was dark and the ship lay at the quayside somewhere in Newfoundland. She would have taken her bundle and slipped out, crossed the shadows of the deck and then run and run and run, desperate to escape and hungering to go back to him.

"I wonder?" he said aloud . . .

The sunlight felt good on his face as he emerged on deck. He lit a cigarette. Nye living from day to day in the hope of hearing the dead voice of a woman who might still be alive. Old man Nye nursing his pride in his private hell of self-accusation up there in a ten-by-eight bedroom. Brooke blew smoke and watched it go thin and blue and vanish.

If he knew what I know, Brooke mused. If anyone else knew, for that matter, Nye would become a shadow, an old man nursing his health in a corner instead of a bull, an old fighting bull with blood in his eye and, somewhere, love for a woman.

That same evening the barometer began to fall again. The sun was hazy, like a torch behind muslin curtains, and towards dusk there came a little wind, chill as marble, that swirled at the street corners and set doors to slamming. It was going to blow again that night.

Brooke couldn't rest.

It grew dark and the lights went on in the houses one by one. A clock struck and the sound was torn to shreds by the wind as a dog worries a rag. He fetched his oilskins and went out into the noisy darkness. It was no gale, but the deep booming of the wind met him at street corners, flogging his coat around his legs and making him frown against the rain.

The yellow window of the inn spilt out across the harbour, its lights touching the leaping white hulls of the fishing-boats. Brooke passed through the door into the smoky, man-warmed atmosphere. The barman served him.

"You don't look too happy, sir." The man watched him from beneath his untidy brows. "The wind's straight offshore, straight out of the harbour tonight. Why don't you cut the old bastard loose and let her blow out to sea?"

"What the hell are you getting at?"

The man raised his thick eyebrows. "No offence, sir. Joke, that's all!"

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" Sorry," Brooke said. " I don't like the weather, it makes me edgy. Have a drink—and mine again."

He felt no effect from the Scotch, he never did. After a while he went out once more into the wind and the rain. He stood in the lee of a warehouse. Distantly he could see Captain Nye's window—and the ship, her masts moving a little.

Farther down the harbour were the coloured neon lights of a waterfront beerhouse. On the wind, there was the throbbing jangle of a piano and singing. It was all noise and hot, close-jostling humanity in there, raw, as strident as the wriggling red-and-yellow reflection of the neon over the harbour water. He levered himself away from the wall and threw his cigarette arc-ing up into the wind.

The door was open, streaming light. He went in, he found a table, and ordered his drink . . .

He saw the girl at the same moment as she saw him. She was by the piano, wearing a silver dress that slid on her breasts and thighs like a cascade of water as she turned. She saw him and tried to look away. Brooke grinned at her and lifted his glass. She carried on singing, her voice was young and strong. She finished the song, there was no applause. She came over to him, sat down.

" You've got a big house here tonight," Brooke said.

" Oh, save it."

" Drink? "

She nodded. " I'll have same as you."

" Straight Scotch isn't a lady's drink."

" Save that, too. Look, mister, don't be flippant with me, have your laugh and let it pass. I'm at the end of the road and from here on I have to walk! O.K., I know what's on your mind—I shouldn't have left my car at the airport, right? "

" You know," Brooke said, " you've got a voice—a voice that'd carry."

" I must try calling hogs some time."

He was looking at her, turning his glass in his hand thoughtfully. " What'll you earn here tonight—a fiver? "

" You mean five pounds? No, sir, I get a percentage on drinks and a handshake."

Brooke made up his mind. " Sing for me—the way I tell you—and you earn your fiver."

" I'll get my coat," she said.

They stood on the quay by the schooner. There was a half moon and the bowling clouds showed glimpses of the open harbour-mouth before the ship, where the sea lay in broad bars

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of glitter, like a shower of broken mirrors. The ship bellowed back at the noisy night, defiant as an old bull.

"This is crazy—you're crazy!" the girl shouted.

"Here's your auditorium."

"O.K., you're paying. What'll I sing?"

"Do you know an old song—a lullaby—something about 'Over the Western Sea?'"

She turned her rain-wet face to him. "Why, sure! *Sweet and Low*—is that the one you mean?"

"I reckon so," Brooke said.

The houses on the hillside looked on with their square yellow eyes. There was the rain sweeping in hanging veils like draped curtains, a window without a light.

"Now?"

"Now." Am I mad? Brooke thought. To hell with Nye, to hell with this place and the whole damned business. This I'll give him, this to remember!

Then the girl was aboard the old ship as he had said she must be. She began to sing and her voice rose over the organ drone of the rigging, high and sweet like a silver wire, cleaving through the gusting rumbling night. Brooke caught the words and caught his breath.

Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea . . .

He listened, his eyes on the dark window, his heart beating. The voice seemed to fill the whole wide, blowing night, filled his head, possessing him. He called to her, "That'll do—stop—stop!"

She went on singing.

He vaulted aboard the ship and ran to her, shook her arm. "Come on, you can forget the rest!" Her song died abruptly.

"Why, what's wrong? Don't you like it?"

"Come on away," Brooke shouted. Within him there had come a sudden and strange fear. It had begun as a sentimental gesture. Now there was something wrong, he wanted to get away.

They walked quickly along the quay. He led her to the harbour mouth where the red flashing light on the pier swung and blinked.

"What got into you?" she said.

"Nothing got into me," he said. "You'd sung long enough, that's all."

"You didn't like the way I sang, is that it?"

"You sang superbly. You earned your money, do I have to say more?" He was holding out the note. She made no move to accept it.

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She turned to him and he could see the pale shape of her face in the darkness. "Why did you want that song in particular?"

"Suppose we just say I like it, I wanted to hear it."

"My mother used to sing it when I was a child back home in the States. I used to get scared on windy nights like this. When my mother was alive, she—she used to sing that song to me."

Brooke swung her to face him. "Tell me your name."

She was looking beyond him. He watched her eyes straining to see something which was behind him. "Look!" she told him.

Out in the harbour something was moving. They saw it resolve from the darkness, take shape and identity: a great dark shape moving fast towards the open sea, the wind humming in the tall bare masts as she drove, leaking and rotten, towards the wide emptiness of the greedy seas.

Brooke watched with grim eyes. There was no way to stop the ship. His tug was behind lock gates in the other harbour basin. There was no desire in him to stop her.

"There's a man aboard her!"

Nye standing at his wheel, remembering the way, listening for the rustle of the water against the harbour walls, fisting the spokes over, and feeling the offshore wind at his broad back.

"Amen!" Brooke said softly.

"He—shouldn't be going to sea?"

"Should," Brooke told her. "He knows his way and where he's going."

The ship passed out on to the breadth of the open waters and was visible for a moment crossing the silver path of the moon, and for that moment she was lit with silver—silver masts, silver, silver.

"Listen!" the girl said.

But Brooke heard nothing.

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SOLUTIONS to MATERIAL ENDS

on page 81

1. *Carpet manufacture.*
2. *To encourage the silk trade.*
3. *i. Penelope; ii. Arachne.*
4. *Barristers.*
5. *The Lord Chancellor, in the House of Lords.*
6. *iii.*
7. *Wooden panelling.*
8. *i. On velvet; ii. On the carpet; iii. On tenterhooks.*
9. *i. Ngaio Marsh; ii. Daniele Varè; iii. Kate O'Brien.*

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Argosy proudly presents a short extract from, Birds in My Indian Garden. The Right Honourable Malcolm MacDonald allows us a tantalising glimpse of his garden in central Delhi where he, as High Commissioner, had to confine his bird watching to two hours before breakfast each day.

Golden Oriole

By MALCOLM MACDONALD

THE loveliest of all Delhi's winged inhabitants, the Golden Orioles, arrived for their annual sojourn in northern India at the beginning of April. They sang melodious catches of song to each other throughout the next few weeks; and many were paired and nest-building by the end of that month. These quick workers were the proud parents of chicks in May, and in June fledglings recently out of nests appeared with their parents in my garden. But the nests that I found there were still laden with family cares in July.

It was enchanting to see a flash of golden-green followed closely by a flash of pure gold dart above the lawn—a hen Golden Oriole brightly shadowed by her male escort. On earlier such journeys they flew to the accompaniment of their own mellifluous music, for he was courting her and sang the orioles' equivalent of the Kashmiri love-song—Golden Orioles being partial to summering in Kashmir. But now they were building a nest and did not wish to draw unnecessary attention to themselves; so they travelled in silence.

She did all the work, and he merely gave her devoted moral support. Among other nesting materials they favoured the fine, plumed stem-tops of a tall reed which grew in my shrubbery, and many times a female would alight in that reed-bed to examine

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the stems for a sample of the right length, texture, and lightness.

As she hopped from plant to plant, the stalks bent and swayed gracefully beneath her weight, and she would consider their comparative merits with all the careful deliberation of a lady choosing the most becoming silk for a dress. When she made up her mind, she gripped the chosen stem in her beak, snapped its top off (plume and all) and then adjusted her hold on it to balance it conveniently across her bill. Sometimes she selected three or four specimens at one visit to the shrubbery and carried them all together in her beak.

Her gorgeous-looking mate watched her with approving eyes from a nearby perch, and when she left to carry her load to their nest he also took off and followed her, like an elegant, gaudily uniformed A.D.C. escorting a Governor's consort home from a shopping expedition.

The nest was a loose though closely-woven bag of grasses slung beneath a drooping, forking branch near the outer edge of a tree. It was roomy, comfortable, and well sprung on its flexible bough, swaying gently in every breeze.

Usually it was concealed in foliage, a very necessary precaution, for otherwise the brilliant plumage of its owners as they visited the site would betray its whereabouts. Like other birds, whether plain or beautiful, they had enemies; and when they owned nests they acquired a fine quality of courageous pugnacity in their defence. I often saw a hen oriole chasing a House Crow from her home tree.

Even more frequent quarrels arose between hen Golden Orioles and hen Green Parakeets. These tiffs always ended in a vicious, sustained pursuit of the parakeet by the oriole, the former flying panic-stricken and squealing in protest as she swerved swiftly this way and that to escape the latter, who followed closely on her tail repeating exactly her every manœuvre.

I was never sure what caused their bickerings. The two species cannot have been rivals for nesting sites, since they occupied entirely different types of premises; and so far as I know neither was a stealer of the other's eggs, a kidnapper of the other's young, or a seducer of the other's mate. The reason for their conflict seemed more trifling.

Once, for example, I saw a hen parakeet and a hen oriole perched near each other on the same branch. They were quiet and passive until the parakeet suddenly pecked disapprovingly at the oriole's tail. The oriole at once flew into a rage, snapped back, and launched herself in impetuous assault on her neighbour, who promptly fled with loud shrieks. At other times the oriole seemed to be the original picker of the quarrel. Could it be

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that both birds recognised the exceeding loveliness of the other, that a feminine sense of rivalry filled the two famous beauties' breasts, and that every now and then it so enraged them that they fell out in violent quarrels?

Just as the hen oriole receives little effective assistance from the male in the building of their nest, so also (I think) she performs all, or almost all, the duties of incubating their eggs. When their chicks hatch he recovers a more proper sense of his parental duties and helps to feed them. But he is less assiduous than she, and also much shyer about approaching the nest . . .

We raised "hides" near two Golden Orioles' nests to take photographs of them. After some initial surprise at the appearance of the hide, and considerable hesitation about approaching the vicinity, the hen in each case later accustomed herself to the new monstrosity and brought food regularly to her youngsters. But the cock was so disturbed that for twenty-four hours after the hide's erection he absented himself entirely, and for another day or two after that his visits were rare.

If the nestlings had depended on him for nourishment, they would have starved before he recovered his confidence . . . It was an interesting illustration of the comparative strengths of the maternal and the paternal instincts in birds.

Thanks to the loving care of their mothers, the oriole chicks in all the nests in the garden survived the hazards of infancy, grew in vigour day by day, and in due course added their beautiful personages to the bird population of Delhi.

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JUNE IN THE SUBURBS

By day the chattering mowers cope
With grass decreed a final winner.
Darkness delays. The skipping rope
Twirls in the driveways after dinner.

Through lupine-lighted borders now
For winter bones Dalmatians forage.
Costly, the spray on apple bough.
The canvas chair comes out of storage.

And rose-red golfers dream of par,
And class-bound children loathe their labours,
While pilgrims, touring gardens, are
Cold to petunias of their neighbours.

PHYLLIS MCGINLEY

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H. E. BATES

The Ring of Truth

GEORGE PICKARD, with a sickening start, woke for the fifth time in a month from a strange dream of his father, who had died suddenly six weeks before.

As always in the dream, his father was catching a train. It was midwinter and bitterly cold and the train, as always, was the night express to the north: sleeper coaches with drawn blinds, white steam from two big engines curdling into a black freezing sky, a strong air of suspense under the hooded yellow lights of an almost deserted platform No. 3.

His father had been a thin tallish man of not very distinguished appearance with deeply fissured cheeks and fair receding hair: a sufferer from gastric disorders that kept him in what seemed to be unenterprising despondency. He had been, in fact, merely a quiet, reserved, conscientious man, and the most remarkable of his features were his very bright, remarkably clear blue eyes.

In each of the five dreams George was seeing his father off, but it was only in the fifth and last dream that any sort of conversation took place between them. Then, as his father leaned from the carriage window, they clasped hands and his father said. " Good-bye, George. Awfully nice of you to see me off so late, Don't linger. It's pretty cold. The Midland Hotel at Skelby Moor will find me until Monday."

Then, as the train began to move away and George turned to

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go too, a strange incident occurred. George almost ran into a hurrying figure of another man walking away from the train: a biggish, burly figure, healthily and expansively handsome, with a fine walnut-brown moustache and an air of superlative confidence and engaging charm. This figure was expensively dressed in a thick grey ulster and a cocoa-brown bowler hat and was carrying a malacca cane umbrella and a rather shabby brown gladstone bag.

Nothing about all this would have been exceptionally unusual except that the gladstone bag was, as George recognised, his father's. He had carried it on his travels for many years. In it he had brought home little presents for George as a boy, model railway engines, chocolate, toy soldiers, and so on, the sort of things that fathers love to bring their sons. It immediately

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occurred to George that the bag was being stolen from his father, and he started shouting. When the figure in the ulster took no notice of this, George started running, or rather trying to run. But as always in dreams his legs were incapable of moving and a second later he was awake, his heart racing, crying aloud.

Always, on waking, George could still smell the sulphurous tang of train smoke, the steamy odours of the restaurant car, the freezing bite of night air. The friendly depth of his father's voice—it was a remarkably coloured voice, a deep shade of brown —was so affectionately real in its every intonation that he fully expected to see him still sitting there at the bedside, still talking.

The sudden shattering of the dream-world notion that his father was still alive left him first shocked and then sunk in unbearable loneliness. But what affected him even more deeply was the curious incident of the gladstone bag. Not only was the bag being stolen but somehow, because of it, George felt that a great wrong had been done to his father, and it continued to haunt him like a pain.

At breakfast, after the fifth dream, he said, "Is there such a place as Skelby Moor?"

"I don't know," his mother said. Her answer seemed off-hand. "I never heard of it."

His mother was a taut blonde woman of fifty with eyes so fair that they seemed to be lashless. She had an irritating breakfast habit of rapidly spreading butter on dry toast and then, in parsimonious thought, scraping most of it off again.

"Did Father ever go there?"

"I don't think so. I never heard of it. Why are you asking?"

"I've got a funny idea I saw a postcard from there once."

"Your father was always sending postcards. He was the champion postcard sender."

"I seem to remember something about fishing. Trout, I think, or it might have been salmon."

"I don't suppose your father ever went fishing in his life," she said. With irritation she did her toast scraping act for the second or third time. "That would have been too enterprising."

Looking away from him, she began to spread marmalade in a thin golden veneer on a square of toast.

"Do we still have the old postcard album?" he said. "I mean the big brown one. The one with the brass clasps."

"It's somewhere," she said. "I suppose it's somewhere."

"I think I'll get it out."

"Oh, don't go charging about!" she said. "Don't go rummaging about upstairs."

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"I don't propose to go charging about," he said. "What is about you this morning? What's up?"

"I've got a head. I'm brittle," she said. "I'm just brittle, that's all."

"You've been brittle ever since Father died."

"And how else do you expect me to be?" she said. "How else?"

After breakfast he started searching in a black tin trunk, up in the boxroom, for the big postcard album with brass clasps that he remembered so often poring through as a boy. He supposed it had been started by his maternal grandmother.

It began with views of Paris and the Promenade des Anglais at Nice, lemon trees at Mentone, heather-pink scenes of Scottish glens, and portraits of famous people such as Houdini, Dan Leno, Caruso, and Madame Patti. It ended with countless dutiful messages, meticulous and uninspired, from his father, the commercial traveller in various lines of carpet slippers, from places as far apart as Aberystwyth and Aberdeen. *Weather not too good. Sold ten gross to Watson & Watson today. Food at Wrexham good. More peas than I could possibly eat. Not sure when I'll be home.*

It contained, among other things, a picture of his mother when a young woman in an expensive-looking sleeveless afternoon dress with a skirt well above the knees. She looked uncommonly attractive and vivacious. She was smiling and her legs were pretty.

Unlike his father, his mother's side of the family had been comfortably well off. They had travelled a good deal: Nice and Mentone in the winter, Scotland in the summer, Paris in the spring; so that she had rather grown up to take pretty, expensive things for granted.

At the back end of the album there was a flap, and in this he found a loose assortment of about a dozen cards. On one of these his father had written, *I've drawn you a picture of a fish I caught yesterday. It weighed 2½ lbs. and when they cooked it for me at The Midland it was bright pink.* The little sketch of the fish had actually been drawn in red ink and on the back was a picture of the parish church at Skelby Moor.

The fact that the fish was sketched in red ink delighted him, and he at once supposed that this was why Skelby Moor had lingered so long and so tenaciously in his memory.

He went downstairs excitedly, taking the card, and said, "What do you make of that? Isn't that odd? There it is—the fish and everything. In red ink. I remembered it from all that time ago."

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"Very interesting."

"These old albums are fun. I'm glad we kept it. By the way, didn't we used to have another one?"

"Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge."

"I feel sure we did. Can't you remember? I'm sure I used to look at it as a boy."

"Why all this sudden fuss about an album?" she said. "Why all this sudden cufuffle about Skelby Moor? You're not thinking of going there, are you? I thought you were going to Brighton in September."

"I think I'm old enough to please myself where I go. There's no fuss."

"Naturally. You're twenty-seven."

"As a matter of fact I am going. It's sort of got under my skin, this place. I've decided to go up for a long weekend."

Suddenly, as he said this, some of her brittleness seemed to dissolve. A certain haggardness about the eyes was partially smoothed out. She seemed to become nervously alight, and urged him quickly and almost too fussingly to let her pour him another cup of coffee. "I think that's the way to do things. Quite impromptu. You always get the most fun when you do things at a tangent, don't you think? You could stay for a week if you wanted to. Why not?"

"I might if I can get the time."

"Be sure to let me know when you're coming back though, won't you?"

He promised he would and then, five minutes later, started for the office, no longer haunted by the dream but feeling in a curious way uplifted. Skelby Moor, he told himself, might be fun. He might even catch himself a trout as pink and delectable as the one his father had sketched on the postcard.

Skelby Moor turned out to be a God-forsaken dingy little town of seven or eight thousand people on the edge of a coalfield in Derbyshire: a place of squat terraces half in red brick, half in grimy stone, with a short main street of shops, five or six pubs, two working men's clubs, and an outdoor beerhouse or two. The square was of stone too, with a central market cross worn almost to alabaster smoothness by generations of lounging men.

Stone walls split the surrounding countryside of hills and dales into lopsided fragments, here and there mauve with heather, mostly bright green from summer rain. It was only August when he arrived and the wind had a grizzling winter sound.

The Midland Hotel was also of stone, also grimy and with a stout front portico. It stood close by the railway station. Trains

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shunted noisily past it all day and some part of the night, belching darkly. The navigation coal they used showered down a fine black dust that settled like a crowd of minute flies on windowsills, table linen, and even bedclothes.

The woman who kept the hotel, Mrs. Lambton, was a stolid sort of cart mare. She had a well-scrubbed appearance, almost over-clean. Her white blouse crackled.

"For how many nights would you want the room, sir?"

"I'm not sure. Four or five. Perhaps a week. I understood there's some good fishing here."

"Oh?" she said. "It's the first I heard of it."

"Perhaps I've come to the wrong place after all," he said. "It's odd how—"

"Well, if you have, you'd better book from night to night until you've made up your mind, hadn't you?"

"Let's say three nights," he said. "I'd like to do some walking anyway."

He began to feel, from that moment, slightly foolish about it all. The long train journey—he had come by train in the slender hope that, in some sort of way, it might tell him something about that burly figure in the ulster—now seemed unnecessary and futile. The dream, though so consistently vivid and real in repetition, now started to mock him slightly.

After supper he walked about the town. After rain the hills beyond it were acid green in the falling sunlight. In the distance, across the town, someone was practising scales on a cornet and soon the repeated monotonous phrases, like the dream, started to mock him too.

After half an hour of strolling about he went back to the hotel and ordered himself a beer. He stood at the bar, drinking it, and said to Mrs. Lambton, "I wonder if you remember my father? He used to stay here. Albert Pickard."

She pondered for some moments, absently scratching one arm through the sleeve of her crackling blouse.

No, she told him at last, she'd never heard of anyone of that name. But then she wasn't so very good at names.

"Did he stay here often? When would this be? If he was a regular I'd remember him."

"I think pretty often. I suppose he probably first came here seven or eight years ago. Possibly longer."

"Oh, that accounts for it," she said. "I wasn't here seven or eight years ago. My husband died suddenly and I got very run down what with one thing and another. You wouldn't perhaps believe it to look at me now, but I had a long bout of T.B. at that time. It nearly took me home."

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He sipped his beer, telling her that it really didn't matter. It was just that his father had mentioned the fishing at some time.

"My sister ran the place while I was away," she said. "I haven't been back so long."

Suddenly for some reason he couldn't explain, he felt intensely curious about the sister. Behind the hotel a train shunted past, belching smoke. A rattle of buffers hit the evening air, raising a chain of echoes that still hadn't died when he said, "Is she here with you now?"

"Who, Kitty? No, I sent her away about a month ago," she said. "She was getting like me, a nervous wreck. I didn't like it. She'd been overworking a lot and got herself into a state. I sent her down to the sea for a while."

"She'll be back, I suppose?"

"She'll be back next Friday, but whether she'll settle, I don't know—that's another matter. She's a restless girl, Kitty. Lately she's really got awfully restless. I sometimes wonder if she'll ever settle here any more."

Perhaps it was the trains, he was on the point of saying. That constant battery of shunting trains raining black dust was hardly, he thought, a cure for restlessness. Instead he said, "She's younger than you, I take it?"

"Oh much. There's fifteen years between us. You'd never know us for sisters."

Later in the evening he took another walk across the square. It was quite dark now and he could actually feel grains of smoke dust from the railway falling on his face and hair and hands. The air was dank with sulphur.

This is a God-forsaken hole for a restless girl to live in, he thought. My God, how could you bear it? And from across the town, on the chilly August night wind, the monotonous scales of the cornet, still tenaciously playing, came to mock him in answer.

Three days later he was back home. It was late afternoon when he arrived. The front door of the house was locked and he noticed that the blinds of his mother's room were drawn. The afternoon had been rather showery, with only fitful bursts of sun, and it struck him at once that she couldn't be at home.

After letting himself in with his latch-key he stood at the foot of the stairs and called up, "Mother, are you there? Are you at home?"

There was no answer. He mounted three or four steps of the stairs and called again. "Mother, I'm back. Are you in?"

This time, after a moment or two of silence, her voice, muffled from behind the bedroom door, answered, "I'm lying down.

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I've had a terrible head all day. I've taken some aspirin and I'd like to be quiet for a while."

"I'm sorry. Of course."

"Get yourself some tea if you want some. If you wouldn't mind."

"I won't bother," he called. "I'm right out of stamps and there are a few letters I want to do. I'll hop down to the post and get some and perhaps have a cup of tea at the Bun Shop on the way back."

"Do that, dear. That's the simplest way."

It was not until he was actually out of the door and into the street that his mind accepted the image of something he had seen while crossing the hall.

He hesitated for a moment, then let himself into the house again and stood for fully two minutes staring at a malacca cane umbrella hanging on the hat stand. The black cover was unrolled and slightly wet with rain.

With a strange feeling of not being himself, of being in some way disembodied, he started to walk slowly to the post office. Another shower was brewing, coming up from the west on blue-black clouds, and spots of rain were actually falling on his jacket without his noticing them when a voice hailed him.

"Hullo there, George. Back so soon?" It was his boss, Freddy Rogers. In his engineering draughtsman's office they worked together more as colleagues than anything else. It wouldn't be long, Rogers promised, before they were partners.

"Why the swift return?"

"Didn't like the place. There was no fishing either."

"You look a bit under par, old boy. Haven't been on the run, have you? You ought to get some sea air."

"I'm off again the day after tomorrow," he said. "Taking the car this time. That's if it's all right with you."

"Why don't you go to that little place on the Suffolk coast I told you about? It's terrifically bracing. It'll put any amount of ginger into you. You look as if you have bad dreams."

"I sometimes do," he said.

"You've got to snap out of this, George," Freddy said. "We've got that big Smith & Hanson contract coming on in September."

Back at the house he was writing letters in the sitting-room when his mother came downstairs, still in a dressing-gown. She looked, he thought, rather more brittle than when he had left her three days before. Her eyes were unradiant and tired.

She kissed him on both cheeks and said, "Tell me about your holiday. Why are you back so soon?"

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" It was too cold. I had all the wrong clothes with me. I'm off south the day after tomorrow, taking the car this time."

" I'm glad about that. It's been cold and rainy here too."

He licked the flap of an envelope, sealed it down, and pressed it hard with the palm of his hand.

" By the way, whose umbrella was that I saw hanging in the hall? I don't remember seeing that before."

With the utmost casualness she said, " Is that your last letter? I'll walk to the post with them if you like. I feel I need some air."

" I'm sorry. I forgot to ask how your head was."

" It's a deal better. I took a fair bit of aspirin. The umbrella? It belonged to the insurance agent who called this afternoon. He forgot it. He came about the final settling up of your father's policy."

" I thought it was already settled."

" Well, so it is to all intents and purposes. It was just that they wanted another paper signed. It's an awful bore, the time they take to get things settled up. Not that it's a fat lump when it comes."

" How much is it? I never asked you."

" Three thousand."

" It's something. You'll manage for a time."

She started laughing with a peculiar distastefulness. " Manage? Manage? I like to do more than manage in my life, thank you. I like nice things. I was brought up to like nice things. You can't expect me to live on bread and water, can you? "

He made no answer to what he thought was an intolerable question. The eyes, behind their fair lashes, were becoming inflamed with temper. He had often seen them flame like that before.

" By the way, the umbrella isn't there now."

" Oh, isn't it? How odd. It couldn't be, I suppose, because he came back and fetched it five minutes ago? "

Again he made no answer. She moved towards the door, brittle again in her every movement, hands forming a restless cage as she locked them in front of her.

" Is there any great urgency about the letters? " she said. " If not, I'll get some supper and take them later."

" No. No urgency. Just when you feel you'd like to go."

" All right." She was already out of the room. " They'll go at midnight anyway."

After supper, tired out and once again oppressed by the curious feeling of being disembodied, not quite himself, he went to bed, leaving his mother to post the letters. The night was very quiet.

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It seemed suddenly to have grown quite sultry, and he lay for a long time with eyes open, re-living among other things the sound of the cornet being practised, the scales haunting and mocking him like the dream of his father.

When he finally slept he was woken some long time later by two sounds: the shriek of a train roaring through the night and the sound of his mother coming home.

As she started to climb the stairs he switched on his torch and looked at his watch.

It was half past two.

By Saturday he was back in Skelby Moor. The spell of wintry August rain had given way first to sultriness, then to clear brilliant sunshine. Everywhere the green hills were alight, fresh and sparkling.

As he walked into the silent and empty lobby of The Midland Hotel he suddenly realised, too late, that half past three in the afternoon is not the best of all possible times at which to arrive at small provincial hotels. The staff are generally resting; the proprietress is either out walking or asleep in her room; the boots is having forty winks or waiting for the racing results or playing cards.

After banging twice without result on a big bell that stood on the reception counter he went and sat in a big horsehair chair in the lounge. He started to read a magazine in which there was a great deal about dogs and horses. Both were animals in which he hadn't the slightest interest and suddenly he felt his eyes begin to close.

Some time later, half asleep, he began to have the strangest feeling that he was being stared at. He also actually thought he heard a voice say, "Oh! Good God," in an astonished half whisper.

He opened his eyes and looked up to see, standing in the doorway of the lounge, a woman of twenty-nine or so with thick attractive dark hair and large enveloping brown eyes. There was a certain restless air of shyness about her that was, as he afterwards discovered, almost entirely the result of sheer surprise. Her dress was pure white linen with scarlet pipings on the cuffs and collar and it looked as if it had just been ironed.

He knew, somehow, that this was Mrs. Lambton's sister. She in turn looked at him as if about to greet him with some exclamatory form of recognition. She had the air of being suddenly confronted by a familiar face she hadn't seen for some time.

"I'm sorry. Did you want something? Have you been waiting long?"

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"Not really." He got up from the chair. "No hurry. It doesn't matter."

"Did you ring? I was upstairs changing my dress. I didn't hear the bell."

"It really didn't matter—"

"Was it a room you wanted?"

"Yes. Just for three or four days."

"Of course. Perhaps you would register?"

Her voice was warm, quiet, and inclined to be rather slow. The vowels, in the northern way, were a little high but altogether without a trace of sharpness.

At the reception desk she turned the visitors' book round to him so that he could fill in his name. He was unscrewing the top of his fountain pen when, to his own intense surprise, she said, "It is Mr. Clarkson, isn't it?"

When he said no, he was sorry, it wasn't Mr. Clarkson, her face suddenly flushed very deeply then, within some seconds, went dead white, not merely startled but completely shocked.

"Oh, really? I felt sure I recognised you. I felt sure you must have stayed with us here before. I'm so sorry. Your face seemed so—"

She made a flurried pretence of searching about the desk for papers. Her hands were nervous, slender, and pale. There was no ring on them, and he said, "As a matter of fact I have. I was here a few days ago. Mrs. Lambton made me very comfortable."

"Oh yes, my sister. She's out this afternoon." He was writing his name in the book now. "My eldest brother came to fetch her for a drive. They're going to have tea somewhere—"

He had finished writing his name by now. He turned the book round towards her, and she looked at it and said, "Oh, I see. Mr. Pickard? I do hope you didn't think it stupid of me just now, Mr. Pickard? I really did think—"

Not all the nervousness had quite gone out of her voice and eyes and hands, and he tried to reduce the situation to final calmness by saying, "It's just one of those things that could happen to anybody. After all, I might say that I'd seen you before. You're quite like your sister."

"Oh, you really think so? Hardly anybody does."

"I think so."

"Perhaps in looks a little," she said, "but not in temperament. Not in temperament." As if this were meant to put a sudden stop to the conversation about her, she turned abruptly and took the key of room No. 12 from a rack behind her.

"I had No. 7 last time," George Pickard said. "It was very quiet—"

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"I'm afraid there's a gentleman in there now. He may be out by Monday. But No. 12 is quite nice. It really is awfully nice—"

"Of course. It was only that the trains—"

"Oh, the trains won't disturb you in No. 12."

As she took him upstairs to No. 12 he half paused on the landing and said, "Oh, there was something I wanted to ask you. I understood there's some decent fishing here."

"Not here," she said. "Not exactly here. But four or five miles up the dale there's a place. Quite a nice stream—"

"Does one need permission?"

"Oh, you simply take a daily ticket, I think. That's what—"

She broke off, again with that sudden intimation of the conversation being closed. A moment later she had unlocked the door of No. 12 and he was in the room, gazing again at the familiar swarm of coal dust on windowsills, furniture, and even counterpane.

"You must tell me when you want to go," she said, "and I'll give you directions."

"I'll probably go tomorrow," he said. "I'll take advantage of the weather. It's a good spell."

She lingered at the door, ready but reluctant to close it. She looked altogether calmer now. The deep, good-looking brown eyes were not troubled. The embarrassment of having mistaken him for someone else had been replaced by an air of rumination.

"I envy you going there," she said. "I like that place. I really envy you."

After that she seemed to disappear from the hotel completely. It was Mrs. Lambton who served drinks when the bar opened and again Mrs. Lambton who came to ask the guests, at dinner, if all was well. Mrs. Lambton was cheerful, glad to see everybody, glad to be of service and even reminded George Pickard to tell the night porter exactly what he wanted for breakfast and when. They believed in good breakfasts at The Midland and there were some lovely kippers.

After dinner, as before, he wandered into the square. Trains shunted smokily about in the sultry August twilight. What a place for a restless girl to be caught up in, he thought again, and once more started instinctively listening for the cornet's mournful, mocking scales.

But this time there was no sound of them and as the light finally faded he started to walk back to the hotel. A figure in a white dress, but now with a scarlet sweater slung loosely over the shoulders, stood under the big stone portico and a voice said, "Admiring our great metropolis?"

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He laughed briefly. "It isn't so bad when it's dark."

"I often think that," she said. "I often think it's a mercy we have nights."

"The night is merciful—didn't someone once say that somewhere?"

"I don't know. If they didn't they should have done."

A moment later he was about to ask her if she would join him in a drink when she said, "I hope you won't mind, but there was something I wanted to ask you. Or rather show you."

"Oh yes?"

"Walk along the street a little way with me, will you?" she said. "Just away from the hotel?"

It was now obvious to him that she was having the greatest difficulty in keeping calm. Several times, in spite of the sultry evening, she nervously hitched her sweater more closely round her shoulders.

Fifty yards away, at the corner of the square, a street lamp was burning. She stopped under it, unfastened her handbag, and took out a postcard. "I just wondered if this might mean anything to you. Of course, I don't really suppose it does, but if—"

He took the card and stared at it under the street lamp. It was a picture of his father.

"Does it? Do you know that man?"

He stood for some time staring at the card, unsure himself now, not knowing what to say.

"If you do, please tell me."

He gave the card back to her. He was sharply aware of a bitter sickness contracting the back of his throat.

"Yes," he said at last. "It's my father."

She stood against the lamp-post, gripping it with one hand exactly as if in fear that she hadn't the strength to stand up by herself. "Can you tell me something else? Where is he now?"

"He's dead. He—"

"What?" The word sounded like a stifled scream; she actually stood with one hand clapped to her mouth, face dead white under the lamp.

"He died six weeks ago."

She made a sudden sharp and helpless movement, so that for a moment he felt sure that she was falling. Instead she merely turned and held blindly, with both hands, to the street lamp.

"Oh, my God," was all she kept saying. "Oh, my God. My dear God."

No rain had freshened the narrow stream for some days and now the water, in most places, was low and clear. It spilt with

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leaping brilliance past limestone boulders stained apple-green at the waterline and between banks of birch, thick bracken, and occasional larch trees. It was the hottest Sunday of the year, George Pickard thought, and in places where big pools formed under trees the water lay in undisturbed glassy darknesses.

"I still think I shouldn't have come," she said. "I know how fishermen like to be alone."

"I asked you to come."

"Being asked isn't necessarily a reason for—"

"I asked you to come."

He had asked her to come because she was, he thought, in no state to be alone and now they were sitting, halfway through the sultry afternoon, by one of the deeper glassy pools. She was wearing a dress that he liked very much: a fresh, simple affair of printed cotton, with a pattern of crimson rosebuds, a rather flared skirt, and a low circular neckline. She looked rather younger than on the previous day, he thought, and though for long periods she was very quiet she seemed altogether less taut, less nervous, and with no trace of hesitation.

In the bracken a prolonged chorus of grasshoppers had the effect of filling the long silences between conversation with a quivering tension. His fishing rod lay undone on the bank; not a single hint of a rise had so far marked the dark skin of water. In one of the longer silences she took off her shoes and then lay full length on the grass, slowly and exquisitely flexing her bare white feet.

"How did you come to know about Skelby Moor in the first place? I suppose your father must have told you?"

It began with a postcard, he started to tell her—his father had drawn a picture of a fish on a postcard—and then a dream.

"A dream?"

He half started to tell her about the dream and then stopped. The strangest of all the effects that the long spells of tension between them produced was a feeling of growing remoteness from each other. He wanted all the time to get to know her better; all the time he felt she was slipping farther away.

"Don't you want to tell me anything about the dream?"

"Not at the moment."

The two words seemed to take him still farther away from her. He heard one of her feet lapping quietly at the surface of the pool. He sat looking at her, in silence, for a long time, noticing how pretty her head was the way she held it to one side, watching her feet and the water. The face looked wonderfully cool, he thought, in the warm shadows.

"What exactly made you come up here anyway?" she said at

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last. "I mean to Skelby Moor. To that awful place. Nobody in their right senses would come up here for a holiday."

He thought for some moments in silence and then said, "Have you ever come to a street corner and felt you simply had to turn it, even though it wasn't the way you intended going?"

"Often."

"It was like that," he said.

How else could he explain, he asked himself, what had made him come up there? There were things that were never capable of rational explanation and he was suddenly aware of juggling confusedly with half truths, and again of not being himself, of not knowing where he was.

"Have you had the dream again since you came up here?"

"No. Why?"

For the first time she gave a little laugh, quite happily.

"Just curiosity. I wondered if I might have been in it, that's all."

He was about to say that he wished she had when she went on, "Do dreams fascinate you?"

"This one does."

"They fascinate me terribly. I dreamt one night that I was walking about barefoot in the snow, looking for the key of our old house, the one where I was born. Then another night I dreamt I was the wife of a sort of tax collector in Persia, in the year 400 B.C. You see, you couldn't know it was 400 B.C., could you, in the first place? How do you explain dreams of that sort?"

He hadn't the faintest idea, he said, any more than he could explain this one.

"There's a strange line I remember about dreams. I read it in a poem at school. It stuck in my mind." She lifted her right foot from the water. Something about its pure whiteness, dripping clear beads of water in the shadow, pricked sharply at his veins, making the blood start racing. "*Thou art so truth that thoughts of thee suffice to make dreams truths; and fables histories.* Do you know that?"

No, he didn't know that, he said. It was very beautiful but he had never heard it before. He was really watching the naked curve of her leg, uplifted from the water. It was pretty and smooth and elegant, and again he felt his blood start racing.

Suddenly he thought, Was it a dream that made you call me Clarkson yesterday? and the words were out of his mouth before he could stop them.

"It was just a silly mistake. It was just one of those odd things—"

"Tell me the truth," he said.

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She turned at once and transfixed him with her wide deep brown eyes and half extended a hand as if about to touch him.

"Get to know me a little better first," she said. "Please."

"How do I get to know you better?" He turned impulsively and pressed his mouth lightly against her throat. He could feel it throbbing quickly and he drew back and said, "Like this?"

"If you like. Whichever way you like. You see I've been through a bad time and—"

Suddenly she put her arms round his neck in a gesture of intolerable longing. He started to kiss her but, with a twisted movement, almost in anguish, she broke away.

"Tell me what made you come up here," she said. "Please. Tell me for God's sake."

"I've tried to tell you—"

"How did you know about me? Did your father ever say anything to you about me?"

No, he said, not once. His father had never said a word.

"But how on earth could you know? I mean—how on earth, that's what I keep asking."

He ran his hands slowly across her bare shoulders. The first fish of the afternoon rose with a sharp plop in the centre of the pool, startling her. "What was that?" she said, and he caressed her slowly again, trying to calm her, this time smoothing the downy hair in the nape of her neck.

"You were fond of my father, weren't you?" he said.

"Yes."

"Very fond?"

"Very fond. In fact you could call it more than that."

He was holding her face in his hands now, turning it fully towards him. "Was he fond of you?"

"In a sort of way. Yes."

"In a sort of way?"

"Yes. I can't explain now. I've told you I'd rather not talk about it now."

He was looking full into her face, full into the deep brown eyes, troubled again now. "You ask me to get to know you better," he said, "and all the time you go farther away."

"Oh, don't look at me like that," she said. "That's cruel. Don't you know how like your father you are in some ways? You've got those same clear blue eyes. Don't you see that's why I made that mistake about you yesterday?"

A moment later she flung her arms impulsively about him again and he drew her down in the grass. He ran his hands from her neck to her shoulders and down to her arms and then finally across her breasts, firm and free under the thin cotton frock. In

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return she kissed him with searching passion, without a word, for a long time, the chorus of grasshoppers beating without rest, in a prolonged throbbing murmur, through the hot afternoon.

Clarkson, his mind kept repeating, Clarkson. Why did she call me Clarkson? Who the devil can Clarkson be? Caught up between passion, the tender feel of her breasts under his hands and the old confusion about half truths, he found his mind full of the most mocking surmises. Was that Clarkson with that blasted umbrella? Could that have been Clarkson boarding the train?

After that it began to seem strange and uneasy to speak of his father. By the end of the hot restless afternoon he had become merely an embarrassing ghost, thrust away into the background, half forgotten. Incredibly it seemed that she actually wanted to forget him and it was some days before he was back in the conversation. And then inconsequentially she said, " What sort of woman is your mother? "

" Oh, I don't know. Fairly ordinary, I suppose."

" Nobody is fairly ordinary."

" Well, she's a devil of a difficult temper sometimes. She has days."

It was shortly past eleven o'clock in the morning. She was doing her turn of duty in the bar. George Pickard, drinking beer, was her only customer. She herself, as she had several times explained, never drank on duty. But suddenly, to his great surprise, she started to pour herself a double whisky, saying at the same time, " I'm going to take you up on that drink you're always offering me. Hope you don't mind? "

" Please," he said. " Of course. But why the sudden change of heart? "

She drank, stared for some time into the glass, drank again, and finally looked up at him. " I suppose it would shock you awfully if I said I loathed and hated your mother? "

It shocked him so much that he was completely without a word of any kind to say.

" I thought you'd be shocked. I'm sorry. But I've got to get it off my chest some time."

" But you never met my mother."

" That makes no difference."

As he watched her drinking it seemed to him once again that they were playing with half truths; and this time dangerously.

" Look," he said, " you'd better tell me about this. You've been putting it off too long."

" Not now. Tonight."

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"Why tonight?"

A moment later she reminded him of his remark about the night being merciful. She felt all mixed up now, she said, and she would find it easier to talk in the dark. "You could come into my room," she said. "I'll tell you about it then."

It was almost midnight before he went into her room. The night was another close, sultry one and she lay in her nightgown on the bed, waiting.

It was nearly another hour before she started talking. She talked with her mouth close to his face, in a continuous whisper that at first he hardly ever interrupted. First of all she must tell him, she said, why she had called him Clarkson. It was simply that that was the name she'd always known his father by; she never knew him by any other. She was not much more than twenty-two when Mr. Clarkson, the traveller in slippers, first booked a room one very cold night in November. She always remembered it vividly because, ashen and half crippled with cold and dyspepsia, he had asked for a glass of peppermint and hot water.

After that he began to come to the hotel regularly: about once a month, she thought. In the usual way with regular guests she got to know him quite well. They chatted in an ordinary sort of way in the lounge or the bar. He was quiet, gentle, unassuming, and unvindictive, a really nice man, and she felt sorry for him because he seemed lonely and because of the stomach pains.

"Why on earth do you suppose he should tell you his name was Clarkson?"

She'd never asked herself, she said. At that time she hadn't any need. Anyway it all went on in that ordinary sort of way until about a year later. Then on another cold wet night he walked in with his bags from the station, half exhausted, and started drinking good and hard.

"But my father never drank," he said. "He never touched it."

She was afraid he did, she said, and that night especially. The barman actually refused to serve him in the end and then, about eleven o'clock, as she herself went up to bed, she stopped on the landing because she could hear a strange sound from Number 7. It was the sound of his father, bitterly weeping.

If there was one sound in the world that made her heart bleed, she said, it was the sound of a grown man crying like that. And that night it upset and haunted her so much that she didn't sleep for more than an hour or so. She had one of those horrible white nights, she said, when the mind ranges starkly, or dreams badly, making sleep a mockery.

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"It was that night I dreamt I was wandering barefoot in the snow," she said, "trying to find the key of our old house."

Next day she felt terribly on edge and restless, half exhausted herself now, and she knew, somehow, that she had to ask him about it. By an unexpected chance he came in extra early for lunch that day and she was alone in the bar, doing her turn of duty. Over a glass of steaming peppermint he began slowly to tell her all about it: how he had gone home unexpectedly, a week before, and had found Mrs. Clarkson—no, of course it would be Mrs. Pickard—busily entertaining a man friend upstairs. It wasn't exactly this circumstance itself that grieved him so much; it was the fact that it had happened before.

The first occasion had had a good deal of publicity. It had been pretty awful, it seemed. His father had beaten the man up rather badly, almost savagely, with a walking-stick; he sort of went berserk and there was a prosecution.

The man came from rather a wealthy family, who briefed a crack solicitor, and his father was finally sentenced, she thought to two months in gaol. It was the prison sentence, coupled with the worry, the misery, and the utter humiliation of it all, that first started those awful dyspeptic attacks that finally dragged him down.

In absolute astonishment he managed to say, "But I can't believe it. I never missed my father at any time."

"It happened when you were away at boarding school," she said. "They kept it from you. It was a winter term. He told me that. It was the thing that nearly drove him mad, of course—the idea that you might get to know somehow and it would be a terrible stigma on you and so on. And then his own awful shame."

"That was why he called himself Clarkson when he took the traveller's job," he said. "I remember him taking that job now. He used to be top man in a rather good gentleman's outfitters and then all of a sudden he had this new job, travelling about the country."

Suddenly her voice stopped being merely warm and reflective. It flared up, dry with anger.

"I suppose you know he adored your mother? Adored and absolutely worshipped her? He carried pictures of her about with him. That was why he forgave her and went back to her—and you, of course. He had to think of you. That was what made it such hell. He was terribly fond of you too."

"I was terribly fond of him," he said. And then, inconsequentially too, he found himself with a strange question to ask. "Did my father ever make love to you?"

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"No," she said. "I wanted him to. Very much. I even suggested it. But it wasn't that sort of love he wanted. He didn't want it that way."

She supposed, she went on to say, that it was really that refusal of his that was responsible for her own affection for him continually getting stronger and stronger.

"You see it wasn't me he wanted. It was your mother—always, all the time. I was just someone he was fond of and could talk to. And after a time—it was a long time too and I was very young—I realised that's all I ever would be. And then it started being hell for me too."

After that he kissed her for a time and then asked her if she were sleepy. No, she wasn't sleepy, she said; she wanted to talk some more.

"Let me talk for a bit," he said. "I want to ask you one or two things. About that second time—the time my father found a man in the house. Was it the same man?"

"It was," she said. "That was the bitter part of it."

"I suppose he never told you what sort of man he looked like? Did he ever describe him at all?"

"He called him a handsome bastard. I remember that. He had the money to dress well too. And to spend on your mother. Your father was very bitter about that."

He lay for some time in silence, ruminating, his mouth against her cheek, and then said, "That dream I told you about. There was a man in that."

"Yes?"

"He was a handsome bastard too." Slowly he told her of the ulster, the malacca cane umbrella, the bowler hat, the brown handsome moustache. "How the hell does he come to be in this dream? I've never seen him in my life before."

"I suppose you could have seen a picture in the paper at the time of the case."

"We weren't allowed daily papers at school. I don't know if it's the same man anyway."

In a whisper he could hardly hear, she said it was all very strange: just as strange as her own dreams about Persia and wandering in the snow and the way he himself knew there was a place called Skelby Moor and a Midland Hotel there. There was no knowing how the mind worked; there was no rational way of explaining these things.

"The Skelby Moor part isn't so strange," he told her. "I already told you. I found a postcard about it in an old album. My father had drawn a fish on it, in red. I suppose it was the fish that made it stick in my mind."

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A recollection of the album took his thoughts back home. He started to think of the other album, the one he could only half remember. He recalled how greatly irritated his mother had been at the mention of it. He remembered her sarcastic impatience at his mention of Skelby Moor, her confession about her morning brittleness.

A few moments later a night goods express ran through the station, whistling as it passed. The reflected glow from the firebox came up through a slit in the windowblind and slid slowly across the ceiling like a crimson bar.

Some time after the sound of the train had passed completely into the distance he said suddenly, "Good God, I've just remembered something."

"About your father?"

"No: about my mother."

For the second time a recollected incident of his boyhood sprang as sharply across his mind as the reflection of the firebox across the ceiling.

"I've just remembered a day when she threatened to thrash me within an inch of my life."

For fully a minute of astonished silence he propped himself up on one elbow, staring down at her naked body, hardly believing what he had remembered.

"I'd been playing tennis," he said. "It came on to rain and we gave it up and I went back home. My mother was out somewhere. I was disappointed about the tennis and I was bored with having nothing to do. I started wandering about the house, poking into drawers and cupboards. We had a linen-cupboard on the stairs and I found another album in it, hidden under a pile of sheets—one I hadn't seen before. It was covered in bright red suède."

He remembered that album with great vividness now. It was full of photographs; one to a page. He remembered taking it downstairs, spreading it on the kitchen table, and turning over the thick cardboard leaves.

He remembered too his mother coming home.

"Why are you always meddling with things? The way you behave sometimes is enough to make a saint swear." She was shouting in the most brittle, livid of voices. "Keep your hands off my property. Do you hear? Keep your hands off my property. I'll thrash you within an inch of your life if it happens again. Do you hear?"

He felt sweat breaking out all over his body at the recollection of the scene. Half exhausted, he lay down in the bed, his head against her bare shoulder.

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"That was where I saw him first," he said. "There were seven or eight pictures of him, and he'd scrawled across every one of them. Good God, why didn't I remember it before?"

Sometimes the mind had a funny way of covering up unpleasant things, she said. Sort of putting a callous over them. Healing the sore.

"His name was Harry," he said. "I remember now. He'd scrawled on every damn picture. 'To my sweetest darling Babs, with everlasting love, Harry.'"

"There was a place your father liked very much to go to," she said next morning. "It's high up. You can see across several counties on a clear day. I'd like to take you there."

They drove up, that afternoon, to a treeless hill of almost sugar-loaf shape high above the dales. Among white limestone crags the dry turf was as short and fine as if pared off with a razor; harebells in blue crowds fluttered about it in a light wind like delicately suspended fragile butterflies. In the low nearer distances patches of heather stained the slopes a peculiar smoky shade of red.

"He always loved to come up here," she said, "even in winter. He said it made him feel released from something—I suppose sort of free."

The breeze, even at that height, was quite warm and after looking down at the immense wide view for a few moments he took off his jacket and spread it over a rock. She sat down and leaned her back against it and he sat with her, one arm across her shoulders.

"He said an awful thing to me just before we came up here for the first time," she said. "It was the thing that really made my heart start breaking for him. He said, 'I feel as if my soul's all locked up in chains.' It was a terrible thing for a man to say and I never got over it. I never got it out of my mind."

Suddenly his heart started aching for his father; he was aware of being uncomfortably close to him again. The lean fissured figure, struggling against pain, took on a new and biting reality.

"It put my soul in chains too," she said, "and then, I don't know quite what made me think of it, but one afternoon I suggested we took a bus and came up here. He loved it. For the first time I actually realised he was happy. His eyes even started dancing."

He felt utterly unable to speak. He was abruptly aware that if he didn't force himself into some sort of sudden physical action his eyes would fill with tears. Without a word he got up and

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walked away from her and stood for nearly ten minutes on the edge of the hillside, staring blindly down.

"Sorry," he said. Back with her again, he sat down and she briefly gripped his hands.

"Don't do that again," she said. "I know how you feel but please don't do it again. Everything you did then was exactly like him. You looked so terribly lonely. It might have been him standing there."

"I missed him like hell when it first happened," he said. "I suppose that's why I dreamt so much about him. Now somehow I've started to miss him more and more."

For the next few moments he was so imprisoned by the blinding reality of his own emotions that he almost forgot that she was there. He finally found himself staring at her in stupefied astonishment. Her face was buried in her hands.

He started bitterly to reproach himself and begged her not to cry but she went on crying, almost silently, for some minutes longer. When it was all over she sat biting her knuckles, and in a double rush of affection for herself and his father he sat helplessly wondering what to say.

"There was something I wanted to ask you," she said at last.

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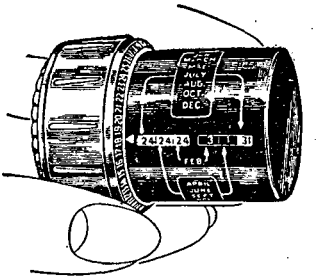

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"Yes?"

"How much longer are you staying here?"

"I've got to go back home," he said. "I've got to see my mother."

"Do you have to go?"

Uncontrollably all his emotions suddenly broke in a bitter rush of fury against his mother: the vain, brittle toast-scraper, the darling Babs, the lover of pretty things.

"Don't you understand?" he half shouted. "She even sits there waiting for the damned insurance! She killed him—she and that bastard—and she sits there calmly waiting to collect the bloody reward—"

He was pacing up and down across the short grass now, hair blowing untidily in the wind, one fist beating into the palm of the other hand.

"I've got to get back there today," he said. "There's a million things I've got to say."

She had sense enough not to try to check or pacify him and for some minutes he continued to rage up and down. Finally, when he appeared a little calmer, she said, "Will you be coming back?"

"Of course I'll be coming back."

As if a sluice had been opened, all his rage suddenly poured clean away; he simply stood there gazing into the thoughtful,

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troubled brown eyes, holding her face in his hands. "I'll be back late tomorrow. Have your bag packed."

"My bag packed?"

"Yes," he said. "You're going to marry me, aren't you? I hope you will, Kitty. I'm asking you."

With a little cry, but not speaking, she started laughing for the first time that day.

"Mind you're waiting," he said, laughing too. "Be here."

"I'll be waiting," she said.

It was already dark when he arrived home that evening, but the light in the sitting-room was still burning. He had stopped at The Cartwright Arms farther down the street to book himself a room for the night and get himself a double whisky for his nerves, but when he went into the sitting-room he was still tense and trembling.

His mother was sitting by an electric fire, reading a magazine. It was raining outside and he didn't even bother to unbutton his mackintosh.

"You're back. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"I just dropped in for some things. I'm going straight back." He put his hat on the table. "I'm going to be married."

"Nice of you to tell me."

With extreme difficulty he kept his voice terse, even restrained. "Surprised you're alone," he said. "No company? Where's Harry?"

"Harry?"

"Yes, Harry. Don't tell me you don't know our Harry."

If he had struck her full in the face she couldn't have looked more stunned. For fully a minute she continued to sit in the chair and then slowly she got up, dropping the magazine in a noisy slide. "As it interests you so much, I haven't seen Harry since your father died."

"How Harry must miss you."

"And nor, since it still seems to interest you so much, shall I be seeing him again. Quite satisfied?"

"Don't tell me Harry's dead too."

If anything was dead, he thought, it was her face. It had never been, he thought, a very soft or ardent face. Vanity had always given it, with those extremely fair lashes, a veneer of superficiality. Now it was white and, like an old skeletonised leaf, almost transparent too.

"Harry got married," she said.

"I hope you congratulated him."

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" His mother died and left him an awful lot of money. He got married almost immediately. He's got a house in Cannes."

Her voice, like her face, seemed skeletonised and lifeless too. Still tense and bitter, he was about to make some remark in the most cynical possible manner about how it was all rather a bad stroke of luck for her, when she said, in the flattest of voices, " It was almost directly after your father died. You don't know Harry, do you? Harry's the sort of man who gets a great kick out of having other men's wives while their husbands are alive. When the husbands are dead it's all too tame. Not fun any more."

He made no attempt to match her bitterness with a renewal of his own until a sudden thought struck him.

" I don't believe it," he said. " He was here last week. Wasn't that his damned umbrella hanging up in the hall? "

" I told you the truth about the umbrella. Anyone can have an umbrella like that. Anyone can leave an umbrella by mistake, can't they? It was the insurance man's."

" Ah, the insurance," he said. " We come to the insurance." He could control himself no longer; all his rage boiled over in a hot stream of shouts. " You killed him, you and that bastard. Oh, I don't mean you poisoned him or anything so bloody simple as that. You didn't hit him over the head with a wrench. But you killed him just the same. He died of an overdose of shame, poor devil. And now you sit waiting for the insurance. Oh, I like the insurance part very much. Very much. It's bloody funny."

He picked up his hat from the table.

" So you haven't seen him? " he said. Once more the main stream of his rage had drained suddenly away. " What about the night you didn't come back until half past two? "

" I was just walking."

" Of course. Naturally. With the great Harry."

He was on the verge of shouting at her something about being a damn bad liar too when she said, " Yes, just walking. By myself. All alone."

Her face, he thought, looked older than ever. It was even more a skeleton of a face than before. Pity for her suddenly fused with all his blinding affection for his father and kept him speechless. He heard her say, " I haven't had anyone to turn to. I thought perhaps you'd help me a bit. I need some help. I'm almost in despair—"

He changed his name! his mind started shouting. He was ashamed of his own name. He went creeping about the country like a stranger, afraid of being recognised.

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"I can't help you!" he shouted. It was all over. He felt empty and old himself now. "I've nothing left to help you with."

Early next day he drove northward under moist humid clouds that gave occasional showers of drizzle. Halfway to Skelby Moor he decided, on a sudden impulse, to stop and buy his wedding present to Kitty. He thought that one of those beauty boxes, with internal fittings of brushes, powder puffs, mirrors, and so on, would be the very thing.

He stopped at the next town and found a shop and eventually picked out what he thought was a neat, stylish bag in scarlet leather. As the shop assistant was making out his bill he suddenly found himself saying, "I don't suppose you've got such a thing as a postcard album, have you?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid not. There's no call for them now. We never stock them. They seem to be out of fashion now."

"I see. Thank you. I just wondered."

He paid the bill and picked up the bag.

"They were good fun, those old albums, weren't they?" the assistant said. "Don't you think so?"

"Great fun," he said. "Awful fun."

He drove northward again. Soon in the distances the hills began to rise through the drizzle and as he drove on, thinking more and more of Kitty, he watched them: slowly appearing and then suddenly disappearing, almost mysteriously, in the drifting summer cloud, like creatures in a dream.

"Be there," he kept saying to himself. He seemed to see her lying once again in the bed, with the crimson bar of light travelling across the ceiling above her. "Be waiting." He seemed to see also his mother's face, old and skeletonised by its own despair. "And for God's sake be true to me."

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Coming!
"No Other Elephant," by Gerald Sparrow.
Next month's Argosy is on sale July 10.

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 3, *Alternating*. 9, *Alarm*. 10, *Provocation*. 11, *Belch*. 12, *Orgy*. 13, *Dismal*. 14, *Utter*. 16, *Artlessness*. 18, *Dumbfounded*. 22, *Reeve*. 23, *Secret*. 25, *Ergo*. 27, *Wasps*. 28, *Impecunious*. 29, *Elver*. 30, *Red-breasted*.

Down. 1, *Harbour*. 2, *Maelstrom*. 3, *Amphora*. 4, *Thoughtful*. 5, *Rook*. 6, *Ananias*. 7, *Ilium*. 8, *Gentles*. 15, *Tenderfoot*. 17, *Expensive*. 18, *Dossier*. 19, *Fiercer*. 20, *Drowsed*. 21, *Measure*. 24, *Cupid*. 26, *Anna*.

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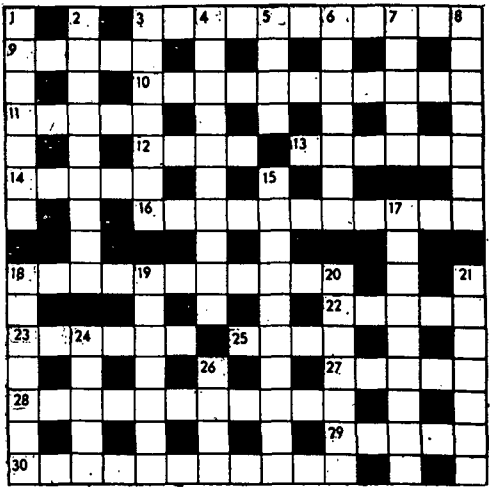
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 143



ACROSS

3 Alternative is direct, currently speaking (11).

9 Fear among rival armies (5).

10 Incitement (11).

11 Sir Toby's eastern politeness (5).

12 Ancient Roman party (4).

13 Is L— mad? No, just blue (6).

14 Speak, and head off the mutter (5).

16 Painting minus nose —simplicity itself (11).

18 Surprised after sort of blonde discovered young Edward (11).

22 It's ropy concerning Adam's girl (5).

23 "How now, you ——, black, and midnight hags!" (Shakespeare) (6).

25 Hence, the blood mixture (4).

27 Is past afterthought for insects (5).

28 I'm Pius on cue, and broke (11).

29 Slippery customer, but very young (5).

30 Russian past the tape? (3-8).

DOWN

1 Sea bar (7).

2 Eddy grown to giant proportions (9).

3 Keats' Grecian urn? (7).

4 Dangerous as Cassius! (10).

5 Knight's feathered neighbour (4).

6 Anna is a high priest (7).

7 Headless lily for Troy (5).

8 Aristocratic worms? (7).

15 Experienced hiker? Quite the reverse (10).

17 No longer 4 but costly (9).

18 Sir does, and is on record (7).

19 Sound to be afraid, man, but actually more intense (7).

20 Nodded off despite the noise inside (7).

21 For itself alone Will wrote it (7).

24 Psyche dropped oil on him (5).

26 She's worth a little each way (4).

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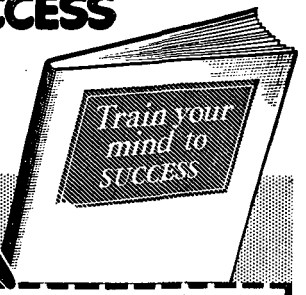

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